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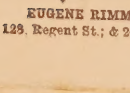

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PIPISTRELLO

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

OUIDA

A NEW EDITION

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1882

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PIPISTRELLO.[1]

I AM only Pipistrello.

Nothing but that; nothing more than any one of the round brown pebbles that the wind sets rolling down the dry bed of the Tiber in summer.

I am Pipistrello; the mime, the fool, the posturer, the juggler, the spangled saltimbank, the people's plaything, that runs and leaps and turns and twists, and laughs at himself, and is laughed at by all, and lives by his limbs like his brother the dancing bear, and his cousin the monkey in a red coat and a feathered cap.

I am Pipistrello; five and twenty years old, and strong as you see, and good to look at, the women have said. I can leap and run against

[1] Originally written in French by the author for the *Nouvelle Revue*.

any man, and I can break a bar of iron against my knee, and I can keep up with the fastest horse that flies, and I can root up a young oak without too much effort. I am strong enough, and my life is at the full, and a day's sickness I never have known, and my mother is living. Yet I lie under sentence of death, and to-morrow I die on the scaffold; if nothing come between this and the break of dawn, I am a dead man with to-morrow's sun.

And nothing will come; why should it?

I am only Pipistrello; I am only Pipistrello. The people have loved me, indeed, but that is no reason why the law should spare me. Nor would I wish that it should: not I.

They come and stand and stare at me through the grating, men and women and maidens and babies. A few of them cry a little, and one little mite of a child thrusts at me with a little brown hand the half of a red pomegranate. But for the most part they laugh. Why, of course they do. The street children always laugh to see a big black steer with his bold horned head go down under the mace of the butcher. The street always finds that droll. The strength of the bull could scatter the crowd as the north wind scatters

the dust, if he were free; but he is not, and his strength serves him nothing. The hammer fells him, and the crowd laughs.

The people of this old Orte know me so well. Right and left, up and down, through the country I have gone all the years of my life. Wherever there was fair or festa, there was I, Pipistrello, in the midst. It is not a bad life, believe me. No life is bad that has the sun and the rain upon it, and the free will of the feet, and the feel of the wind, and nothing between it and heaven.

My father had led the same kind of life before me; he died at Genoa, his spine broken in two like a snapt bough, by a fall from the trapeze before the eyes of all the citizens. I was a big baby in that time, thrown from hand to hand by the men in their spectacles as they would have thrown a ball or an orange.

My mother was a tender, young, and gentle creature, full of tenderness for her own people: with strangers shy and afraid. She was the daughter of a poor weaver. My father had found her and wooed her in Etruria, and although he had never taken the trouble to espouse her before the mayor, yet he had loved her and had always treated her with great respect. She was a woman

very pure and very honest. Alas, the poor soul! To-day her hair is white as the snow, and they tell me she is mad.

So much the better for her if she know nothing; but I fear the mad and the imbecile know all and see all, crouching in their hapless gloom.

When my father died thus at Genoa my my mother took a hatred for all that manner of living, and she broke off all ties with the athletes who had been his comrades, and, taking the little money that was hers in a little leather bag, she fled away with me to the old town of Orte, where my grandmother still lived, the widow of the weaver.

The troop wished to keep me with them; for although I was but five years old, I was supple and light and very fearless, and never afraid of being thrown up in the air, a living ball, in their games and sports.

Orte was just the same then as it is now: these very aged towns I think never change; if you try to alter them you must break them up and destroy them utterly. Orte has known the Etruscans; she can very well do without modern folk.

At Orte my mother and grandmother dwelt

together in one room that looked over the river; a large vaulted chamber with grated casements, with thick stone walls, a chamber that had once been in a palace. My mother was very young then still, and beautiful; of a pale, serious beauty, full of sadness. She smiled on me sometimes, but never once did I hear her laugh. She had never laughed since that awful day when, in the full sunlight, in the midst of the people, in the sight of the sea, in Genoa, a man had dropped from air to earth like an eagle fallen stone dead from the skies, struck by lightning.

My mother had many suitors. She was beautiful of face, as I say, like one of the Madonnas of our old painters; she was industrious, and all her little world knew very well that she would one day inherit the strip of field and the red cow that my grandmother owned outside the gates of Orte.

All these pretty suitors of course made a great fuss with me, caressed me often, and brought me tomatoes, green figs, crickets in wire cages, fried fish, and playthings. But my mother looked at none of them. When a woman's eyes are always looking downward on a grave, how should their tear-laden lids be lifted to see a fresh lover?

She repulsed them all; always.

She lived, lonely and sad, as well as she could in our great garret; we ate little, our bed was hard, and she and my granddame laboured hard to get a pittance. But when a rich bailiff sought her in honest marriage, she kissed me, and wept over me, and said again and again, 'No, no! to your father I will be faithful, let what will chance to us!'

The bailiff soon consoled himself; he married a big country wench who had a fine rope of pearls and gold bracelets, and I continued to grow up by my mother's side, where the Tiber is gilded with the gold of the dawns, and rolls its heavy waves under the weeping boughs of its willows. My boyish strength increased in the heat of the summers, and I grew like a young brown stalk of the tall maize. I herded the cow, and I cut the rushes, and I hewed wood, and I was always happy, even when my mother would send me to the old priest to learn things out of books and breviaries. She wished to make a monk of me, but the mere idea made me shudder with fear. I loved to climb the oaks, to swing in the maples, to scale the roofs, and the towers, and the masts of the vessels. What had I to do with a

monkish frock and a whitewashed cell? *Ouf!* I put my fingers in my ears and ran away whenever my poor mother talked of the cloister.

My limbs were always dancing, and my blood was always leaping, laughing, boiling merrily in my veins. A priest? What an idea!—I had never wholly forgotten the glad, bright days of childhood, when my father had thrown me about in the air like a ball; I had never wholly forgotten the shouts of the people, the sight of the human sea of faces, the loud, frank laugh of the populace, the sparkle of the spangled habit, the intoxication of the applause of a crowd. I had only been five years old then, yet I remembered, and sometimes in the night I cried bitterly for, those dead days. I had only been a little brown thing, soft and warm, with curls as black as the raven's wing, and they had thrown me from one to the other lightly, laughingly, like a ripe apple, like a smooth peach. But I had known what it was to get drunk on the 'hurrahs' of the multitude, and I did not forget them as I grew up here in my dulness, a youth in old Orte.

When you have once heard the voice of the public saluting you, and cheering you, and calling for you, never again can you bear to be without

it; you always miss that sound, like the clash of brazen cymbals, which moves your soul like music when the people love you.

The son of an athlete can never rest quiet at home and at school like the children of cobblers, and coppersmiths, and vinedressers. All my life was beating in me, tumbling, palpitating, bubbling, panting in me, moving incessantly, like the wings of a swallow when the hour draws near for its flight, and the thirst for the south rises in it. With all my force I adored my pale, lovely, Madonna-like mother, but all the same as I trotted towards the priest with a satchel on my back, I used to think, would it be very wicked to throw the books into the river, and run away to the fields? And, in truth, I used to run away very often, scampering over the country around Orte like a mountain hare, climbing the belfries of the churches, pulling off their weathercocks or setting their bells a-ringing, doing a thousand and one mischievous antics; but I always returned at nightfall to my mother's side. It seemed to me it would be cruel and cowardly to leave her. For she had but me in the world.

'You promise to be sensible and quiet, Pippo?' the poor soul always murmured. And

I used to say, 'Yes,' and mean it. But can a bird promise not to fly when it feels in its instincts the coming of spring? Can a young colt promise not to fling out his limbs when he feels the yielding turf beneath his hoofs?

I never wished to be disobedient, but somehow, ten minutes after I was out of her sight, I was high above on some tower or belfry with the martens and the pigeons circling about my curly head. I was so happy on high there, looking down on all the old town misty with dust, the men and women like ants on an ant heap, the historic river like a mere ribbon, yellow and twisted, the palaces and the tombs all hidden under the same grey veil of summer dust. I was so happy there!—and they spoke of making me into a monk, or, if I would not hear of that, of turning me into a clerk in a notary's office.

A monk? a clerk? when all the trees cried out to me to climb, and all the birds called to me to fly!

I used to cry about it with hot and stinging tears, that stung my face like lashes, lying with my head hidden on my arms in the grass by the old Tiber water. For I was not twelve years old, and to be shut up in Orte always, growing grey and

wrinkled as the notary had done over the wicked, crabbed, evil-looking skins that set the neighbours at war:—the thought broke my heart. Nevertheless, I loved my mother, and I mended my quills, and tried to write my best, and said to the boys of the town, 'I cannot bend iron, or leap, or race any more. I am going to write for my bread in the notary's office a year hence, and my mother wishes it, and so it must be.'

And I did my best not to look up to the jackdaws circling round the towers, or the old river running away to Rome.

For all the waters cried to me to leap, and all the birds to fly.

And you cannot tell unless you have been born to do it as I was, how good it is to climb, and climb, and climb, and see the green earth grow pale beneath you, and the people dwindle till they are small as dust, and the houses fade till they seem like heaps of sand, and the air gets so clear around you, and the great black wings flap close against your face, and you sit astride, where the bells are, with some quaint stone face beside you that was carved on the pinnacle here a thousand years and more ago, and has hardly been seen of man ever since; and the

white clouds are so close to you that you seem to bathe in them, and the winds toss the mists and part them, and go by you, down to the world below to torment the trees, and the sea, the men that work, and the roofs that cover them, and the sails of their ships in the ocean; men are so far from you, and heaven seems so near; the fields and the plains are lost in the vapours that divide you from them, and all the noise of living multitudes comes only very faintly to your ear, and sweetly, like the low murmuring of bees in the white blossoms of an acacia in the month of May.

But you do not understand this, you poor toilers in cities who pace the street and watch the faces of the rich

And I to whom this life of the upper air was joy, was ecstasy, I was doomed to be a notary's clerk, I called Pipistrello (the bat) because I was always whirling and wheeling in air, was to be a clerk, so my mother and grandmother decided for me, with the old notary himself who lived at the corner, and made his daily bread by carrying fire and sword, where he could, through the affairs of his neighbours. He was an old rascal, but my mother did not know that; he promised to

be a safe and trustworthy guardian of my youth, and she believed he had power to keep me safe from all dangers of destiny. She wanted to be sure that I should never run the risks of my father's career, she wanted to see me always before the plate of herb-soup on her table. Poor mother!

One day in Orte chance gave me another fate than this of her desires.

One fine sunrise on the morning of Palm Sunday I heard the sharp sound of a screeching fife, the metallic clash of symbols, the shouts of boys, the rattle of a little drum.

It was the rataplan beating before a troop of wrestlers and jugglers who were traversing the Marche and Reggio-Emilia.

The troop stationed themselves in a little square, burnt by the sun and surrounded by old crumbling houses; I ran with the rest of the lads of Orte to see them. Orte was in holiday guise; aged, wrinkled, deserted, forgotten by the world as she is, she made herself gay that day with palms and lilies and lilac, and the branches of willow; and her people, honest, joyous, clad in their best, who filled the streets and the churches, and winehouses, after mass

flocked with one accord and pressure around the play-place of the strollers.

It was in the month of April; outside the walls and on the banks of Tiber, still swollen by the floods of winter, one could see the gold of a million daffodils and the bright crimson and yellow of tulips in the green corn.

The scent of flowers and herbs came into the town and filled its dusky and narrow ways; the boatmen had green branches fastened to their masts; in the stillness of evening one heard the song of crickets, and even a mosquito would come and blow his shrill little trumpet, and one was willing to say to him 'welcome,' because on his little horn he blew the good news, 'Summer is here!'

Ah those bright summers of my youth! I am old now; ay, old; though I have lived through twenty-five years.

This afternoon on Palm Sunday I ran to see the athletes as a moth flies to the candle; in Italy all the world loves the saltimbank, be he dumb or speaking, in wood or in flesh, and all Orte hastened, as I hastened, under the sunny skies of Easter.

I saw, I trembled, I laughed, I sobbed with

ecstasy. It was so many years that I had not seen my brothers! Were they not my brothers all?

This day of Palm, when our Orte, so brown and so grey, was all full of foliage and blossom like an old pitcher full of orange-flowers for a bridal, it was a somewhat brilliant troop of gymnasts who came to amuse the town; the troop was composed of an old man and his five sons, handsome youths and very strong, of course. They climbed on each other's shoulders, building up a living pyramid; they bent and broke bars of iron, they severed a sheep with one blow of a sword; in a word, they did what my father had done before them. As for me, I watched them stupefied, fascinated, dazzled, blind, drunk with delight, and almost crazy with a torrent of memories that seemed to rain on me like lava as I watched each exploit, as I heard each shout of the applauding multitudes.

It is a terrible thing, a horrible thing, those inherited memories that are born in you with the blood of others. I looked at them, I say, intoxicated with joy, mad with recollection and with longing:—and my mother destined me to a notary's desk and wished me to be shut up

there all my life, pen in hand, sowing the seeds of all the hatreds, of all the crimes, all the sorrows of mankind, lighting up the flames of rage and of greed in human souls for an acre of ground, for a roll of gold! She wished to make me a notary's clerk! I gazed at these men who seemed to me so happy; these slender, agile, vigorous creatures in their skins that shone like the skin of green snakes, in their broidered glittering spangled vests, in their little velvet caps with the white plume in each—'Take me! take me!' I shricked to them; and the old king of the troop looked hard at me, and when their games were finished, crossed the cord that marked their arena, and threw his strong arms about me and cried: 'Body of Christ! you are little Pippo!' For he had been my father's mate.

To be brief, when the little band left Orte I went with them.

It was wickedly done, for my poor mother slept, knowing nothing, when in the dusk before daybreak I slipped through the bars of the casement, and noiselessly dropped on to a raft in the river below, and thence joined my new friends.

It was wickedly done; but I could not help it. Fate was stronger than I.

The old man did not disturb himself as to whether what he had encouraged me to do was ill or well. He foresaw in me an athlete who would do him honour and make the ducats ring merrier in his purse. Besides, I had cost him nothing.

From this time life indeed began for me. I wept often; I felt the barb of a real remorse, when I passed a crucifix on the road I trembled with true terror and penitence; but I fled away always; I drew my girdle closer about my spangled coat and, despite all my remorse, I was happy.

When I was very very far away I wrote to my mother, and she understood, poor soul, that there were no means of forcing me back to her. Children are egotists; childhood has little feeling. When the child suffers he thirsts for his mother, but when he is happy, alas! he thinks little and rarely about her.

Your French poet Victor Hugo adores childhood; but he is wrong there; childhood is often more cruel, more hard, more ferocious, more implacable, more avaricious than old age.

I was very happy, full of force and of success;

the men kept their word and taught me all their tricks, all their exploits. Soon I surpassed my teachers in address and in temerity. I soon became the glory of their band.

In the summer time we wandered over the vast Lombard plains and the low Tuscan mountains; in winter we displayed our prowess in Rome, in Naples, in Palermo; we loitered wherever the sun was warm or the people liked to laugh.

From time to time I thought of my mother; I sent her money. I shivered a little when I saw a Madonna, for all Madonnas have the smile that our mother has for our infancy.

I thought of her, but I never went home.

I was Pipistrello the champion-wrestler. I was a young Hercules, with a spangled tunic in lieu of a lion skin. I was a thousand years—ten thousand leagues—away from the child of Orte. God is just! It is just that I die here, for in my happy years I forgot my mother.

I lived in the sunlight—before the crowds, the nervous crowds of Italy—singing, shouting, leaping, triumphing; and I forgot my mother alone in the old chamber above the Tiber: quite alone, for my granddame was dead.

That I have slain what I have slain—that is nothing. I would do the same thing again had I to live my life again. Yes; without pause or mercy would I do it. But my mother—she has lived alone, and she is mad. That is my crime.

I was a tall strong youth, full of courage, and handsome to the eye of women; I led a life noisy and joyous, and for ever in movement. I was what my father had been before me. So they all said.

Only I liked to finger a book and my father never had looked inside one; and, out of remembrance of the belief of my mother, I uncovered my head as I passed a church or saw a shrine, and to do this had not been in my father's habits. In these years I made a great deal of money, a great deal, at least, for a stroller, but it went as fast as it came. I was never a vicious man, nor a great gambler or drinker; yet my plump pieces soon took wing from my pocket, for I was very gay, and I liked to play a lover's part. My life was a good life, that I know; as for the life of the rich and of the noble, I cannot tell what it is like, but I think it is of a surety more gloomy and mournful than mine.

In Italy one wants so little; the air and the light, and a little red wine, and the warmth of

the wind, and a handful of maize or of grapes, and an old guitar and a niche to sleep in near a fountain that murmurs and sings to the mosses and marbles—these are enough, these are happiness in Italy. And it is not difficult to have thus much, or was not so in those days. I was never very poor, but whenever money jingled in my purse I treated all the troop and half the town, and we laughed loud till daybreak.

I was never aught save Pipistrello, Pipistrello the wrestler, who jumped and leaped and lifted an ox from the ground as easily as other men lift a child. No doubt to the wise it seems a fool's life, to the holy a life impure. But I had been born for it, no other was possible to me; and when money rained upon me, if I could ease an aching heart or make a sick lad the stouter for a hearty meal, or make a tiny child the gladder for a lapful of copper coins, or give a poor stray dog a friend and a bed of straw, or a belaboured mule a helpful push to the wheels of his cart—well, that was all the good a mountebank could look to do in this world, and one could go to sleep easy upon it.

When the old man died who had been my father's comrade, the troop fell to pieces, quarrel-

ling over his leavings. The five brothers came to a common issue of stabbing. In Italy one takes to the knife as naturally as a child to the breast. Tired of their disputes, I left them squabbling, and struck off by myself, and got a little band together quite of youths, and with them made merry all across the country from sea to sea. We were at that time in the south. I was very popular with the people. When my games were done I could sing to the mandoline, and improvise, and make them laugh and weep; some graver men who heard me said I might have been a great actor or a great singer. Perhaps; I never was anything but Pipistrello the stroller. I wanted the fresh air, and the wandering, and the sports of my strength too much, ever to have been shut in a roofed theatre, ever to have been cooped up where lamps were burning.

One day, when we were in dusty brown Calabria, parching just then under June suns, with heavy dust on its aloe hedges and its maize fields, a sudden remorse smote me; I thought of my mother, all alone in Orte.

I had thought of her scores of times, but I had felt ashamed to go and see her—I who had left her so basely. This day my remorse was

greater than my shame. I was master of my little troop. I said to them, 'It is hot here, we will go up Rome-way, along the Tiber;' and we did so.

I have never been out of my own land: I fancy it must be so dark there—the other side of the mountains. I know the bye-roads and the hill-paths of Italy as a citizen knows the streets and lanes of his own *contrada*. We worked and played our way, now, up through the Basilicata, and Campania, and Latium, till at last we were right near to Orte: dull old grey-coloured Orte, crumbling away on the banks of Tiber.

Then my heart beat, and my knees shook, and I thought—if she were dead?

I left my comrades drinking and resting at a wineshop just outside the town, and went all alone to look for her. I found the house, the gloomy barred window hanging over the water; the dark stone walls frowning down on the gloomy street. There was a woman, quite old, with white hair, who was getting up water at the street fountain that I had gone to a thousand times in my childhood. I looked at her. I did not know her: I only saw a woman, feeble and old. But she, with the brass secchia

filled, turned round and saw me, and dropped the brazen pitcher on the ground, and fell at my feet with a bitter cry.

Then I knew her.

When in the light of the hot, strong sun I saw how in those ten years my mother had grown old—old, bent, broken, white-haired, in those ten years that had been all glow and glitter, and pleasure and pastime, and movement and mirth to me—then I knew that I had sinned against her with a mighty sin: a sin of cruelty, of neglect, of selfish wickedness.

She had been young still when I had left her; young, and fair to look at, and without a silver line in her ebon hair, and with suitors about her for her beauty like bees about the blossoms of the ivy in the autumn time. And now—now she was quite old.

She never rebuked me; she only said,

'My son, my son! Praise be to God! Praise be to God!' and said that a thousand times, weeping and trembling.

Some women are like this.

When the bright, burning midsummer day had grown into a grey, firefly-lighted night, I laid me down on the narrow bed where I had

slept as a child, and my mother kissed me as though I were a child.

It seemed to purify me from all the sins of all the absent years: except, indeed, of that one unpardonable sin against her.

In the morning she opened the drawers of an old bureau, and showed me everything I had sent her all those years: all was untouched; the money as well as the presents. 'I took nothing while you did not give me yourself,' she said.

I felt my throat choke.

It was early day; she asked me to go to mass with her. I did, to please her. All the while I watched her bent, feeble, aged figure, and the white hair under the yellow kerchief, and felt as if I had killed her. This lone old creature was not the mother like Raffaelle's Madonna I had left. I could never make her again what she had been.

'It is my son,' she said to her neighbours; but she said it with pain rather than with pride, for she hated my calling; but Orte was of another way of thinking. Orte flocked to see me, having heard of Pipistrello; its own Pipistrello, who had plagued it with his childish tricks, having grown

into fame amongst the cities and villages as the strongest man in all Italy.

For indeed I was that: and my mother, with dim tear-laden eyes looked at me and said, 'You are the image of your father. O my dear, my love!—take care.'

She, poor soul, saw nothing but the fall she had seen that day at Genoa of a strong man who dropped like a stone. But I fear to weary you. Well—I had left my spangled dress and all insignia of my calling with my comrades at the wineshop, fearing to harass my mother by sight of all those things which would be so full of bitter recollection and dread to her. But Orte clamoured for me to show it my powers: Orte, which was more than half asleep by Tiber's side, like that nymph Canens whom I used to read of in my Latin school-books: Orte, which had no earthly thing to do this long and lazy day in the drought of a rainless June.

I could not afford to baulk the popular will, and I was proud to show them all I could do; I, Pipistrello, whom they had cuffed and kicked so often in the old time, for climbing their walnut trees and their pear trees, their house roofs and their church towers. So, when

the day cooled, I drew a circle with a red rope round myself and my men on a piece of waste ground outside the town, and all Orte flocked out there as the sun went down, shouting and cheering for me as though Pipistrello were a king or a hero. The populace is always thus: the giddiest-pated fool that ever screamed; as loud and as ignorant as a parrot; as changeful as the wind in March; as base as the cuckoo;—the same people threw stones at me when they brought me to this prison; the same people that feasted and applauded me then, that first day of my return to Orte. To-day, indeed, some women weep, and the little child brings me half a pomegranate. That is more remembrance than some fallen idols get, for the populace is cruel: it is a beast that fawns and slavers, then tears.

It was a rainless July, as I say. It was very warm that evening; the low west was vermilion, and the higher sky was violet; bars of gold parted the two colours; the crickets were hooting, the bats were wheeling, great night-moths were abroad. I felt very happy that night.

With us Italians pain rarely stays long. We feel sharply, but it soon passes. I had drowned my remorse in the glory and vanity of showing

Orte all I could do by the sheer force of my muscles and sinews. We are not a very brave people, nor a strong one, and so strength and bravery seem very rare and fine things on our soil, and we make a great clatter and uproar when we ever find them amidst us.

I had them both, and the people were in ecstasies with all I did. I put out all my powers, and in the circle of red rope exerted all my might, as though I had been performing before kings. After all, there is no applause that so flatters a man as that which he wrings from unwilling throats, and I know Orte had been long set against me by reason of my boyish mischief and my flight.

In real truth, I did nothing now in my manhood so really perilous as I had done in my childhood, when I had climbed to the top of the cross on the church, and sat astride of it. But they had called that mischief and blasphemy; they called the things I did now gymnastics, and applauded them till the noise might have wakened the Etrurian dead under the soil.

At last I came to the feat which, though far from the hardest to me, always looked to the crowd the most wonderful; it was my old

master's trick of holding his five sons on his shoulder. Only I outshone him, and sustained on mine seven men in four tiers, and the topmost had on his head little Febo.

The mite whom we called Phœbus, because we had found him at sunrise, and he had such yellow locks, yellow as the dandelion or the buttercup, was a stray thing picked up on the sea-shore in Apulia; a soft, merry, chirping little fellow of whom we were all fond, and to whom we had easily taught that absence of fear which enabled us to play ball with him in our spectacles. He always delighted the people; he was such a pretty little lad, and not, perhaps, more than four years old then, and always laughing, always ready. To him it was only fun, as it had been to me at his years. I never thought it was cruel to use him so: I had been so happy in it myself. All at once as I stood erect, sustaining the men on my shoulders, the topmost one holding on his head our tiny Phœbus—all at once as I did this, which I had done a hundred times, and have always done in safety—all at once, amongst the sea of upturned faces in the glowing evening light, I saw one woman's eyes. She was leaning

a little forward, resting her cheek on her hand. She had black lace about her head, and yellow japonica flowers above her left ear. She was looking at me and smiling a little.

I met her eyes, full, across the dust reddened by the sunset glow as the dust of a battlefield is reddened with blood. I felt as if I were stabbed—the red dust seemed to swim round me—I staggered slightly: in another instant I had recovered myself, but the momentary oscillation had terrified my comrades. The seventh and highest, feeling the human pyramid tremble beneath him, involuntarily, unconsciously opened his arms to save himself. He did not lose his balance, but he let the child fall. It dropped, as an apple broken off the bough falls to the earth.

There was a moment of horrible silence. Then the men leaped down, tumbling and huddling one over another, not knowing what they did. The audience rose screaming, and broke the rope, and swarmed into the arena. I stooped and took up the child. He was dead.

His neck had been broken in the fall; he had struck the earth with the back of his head; he was rolled up on the sand like a little dead

kid; his tiny tinsel crown had fallen off his curls, his tiny tinselled limbs were crushed under him, his blossom-like mouth was half open.

It was horrible.

People spoke to me. I did not see or hear them. The crowd parted and scattered itself, some voluble, some dumb with the shock of what they had seen. I lifted up what a moment before had been little Phœbus, and bore him in my arms to my mother's house. She was sitting at home alone, as she had been alone these ten years and more. When she saw the dead baby in those glistening spangled clothes she shuddered, and understood without words. 'Another life?' she said, and said nothing more: she was thinking of my father. Then she took the dead child and laid him on her knees as if he had been a living one, and rocked him on her breast and smoothed the sand out of his pretty yellow curls.

'The people go always in the hope of seeing something die,' she said at length. 'That is what they go for: you killed the baby for their sport. It was cruel.'

I went out of the house and felt as if I had murdered him—the little fair innocent thing who had run along with us over the dusty

roads, and along the sad sea-shores, and under the forest trees, laughing and chirping as the birds chirp, and when he was tired lifting up his arms to be carried on the top of the big drum, and sitting there throned like a king.

Poor little dead Phœbus! it was true what my mother had said: the people throng to us in hope of seeing our death, and yet when they do see it they are frightened and sickened, and sorrowful. Orte was so this night.

'Could I help it?' I cried to my comrades fiercely; and in my own soul I said to myself, 'Could I help it? That woman looked at me.'

Who was she? All through the pain that filled me for the death of the child, that wonder was awake in me always. She had looked so strange there, so unlike the rest, though she was all in black, and had the lace about her head which is common enough in our country. All the night long I saw her face: a beautiful face with heavy eyelids and drooping hair like that marble head they call the Braschi Antinous down in Rome.

Little Phœbus was laid that night in my mother's house, with lilies about him, while a little candle that the moths flickered into burnt at his feet. As I sat and watched by

him to drive away the rats which came up in hordes at night from Tiber into the rooms that over-hung the river, I only saw that face. It had been a bad home-coming.

I would play no more in Orte, nor go with these men any more. I disbanded my troop and let them pass their own ways. I had coin enough to live on for months, that was enough for the present. I felt as if the sight of the red rope and the spangled vest and the watching crowd would be horrible to me: those things which I had loved so well. Little Phœbus was put away in the dark earth as the little Etruscan children had been so many hundred years before him, and I buried his little crown and his little coat with him as the Etruscans buried the playthings. Poor little man! we had taught him to make Death his toy; and his toy had been stronger than he.

After his burial I began my search for the woman whose face I had seen in the crowd. My mother never asked me whence I came or where I went. The death of Phœbus had destroyed the trembling joy with which she had seen me return to her: happiness came to her too late. When grief has sat long by one hearth, it is impossible

to warm the ashes of joy again; they are cold and dead for ever. My time passed sadly; a terrible calmness had succeeded to the gaiety and noise of my life; a frightful silence had replaced the frenzied shouts, the boisterous laughter of the people: sometimes it seemed to me that I had died, not Phœbus.

The constant hope of finding the woman I had seen but once occupied me always. I roamed the country without ceasing, always with that single hope before me. Days became weeks. I wandered miserably, like a dog without master or home.

One day I saw her. Having on my shoulder my *girella* which gave me a pretext for straying along the river side, I came to that part of Etruria where (so I had used to learn from the school books in my childhood) the Etruscans in ancient times drew up in order of battle to receive Fabius.

The country is pretty about there—or at least it seemed so to me. The oak woods descend to the edge of the Tiber; from them one sees the snow of the Apennines; the little towns of Giove and Penna are white on the Umbrian hills; in the low fields the vine and the olive, and the

maize and the wheat grow together. Here one finds our Lagherello, which I have heard scholars say is no other than the lake Vadimon of which Pliny speaks.

Of that I know nothing; it is a poor little pool now, filled with rushes peopled with frogs. By the side of this pool I saw her again; she looked at me.

Like a madman I plunged into the water, but the reeds and the lilies entangled me in their meshes; the long grasses and water-weeds were netted into an impenetrable mass.

I stood there up to my waist in water, incapable of movement, like the poor cattle of which Pliny tells, who used to mistake all this verdure for dry land, and so drifted out into the middle of the lake. She looked at me, laughed a little, and disappeared.

Before sunset I had learned who she was, from a peasant who came there to cut the reeds.

Near to the Lagherello is a villa named Sant' Aloïsa; about its walls there is a sombre melancholy wood, a remnant of that famous forest which in the ancient times the Romans dreaded as the borders of hell.

The Tiber rolls close by, yellow and muddy

with the black buffaloes descending to its brink to drink, and the snakes and the toads in its brakes counting by millions; sad, always sad, whether swollen by flood in autumn, and vomiting torrents of mud, or whether with naked sands and barren bed in summer, with the fever-vapours rising from its shallow shoal.

The villa is dull and mournful like the river; built of stone, fortified in bygone centuries, without colour, without light, without garden or greenery, all its casements closed like the eyelids of a living man that is blind.

This was and is Sant' Aloïsa. In the old times, no doubt, the villa had been strong and great, and peopled with a brilliant feudal pomp, and noisy with the clash and stir of soldiery; now it is poverty-stricken and empty, naked and silent, looking down on the tawny sullen swell of the Tiber: the terrible Tiber that has devoured so much gold, so much treasure, so much beauty, and hidden so many dead and so many crimes, and flows on mute and gloomy between its poisonous marshes. Of Tiber I have always felt afraid.

Sant' Aloïsa has always been a fief of the old Counts Marchioni.

One of that race lived still, and owned the old

grounds and the old walls, though the fortunes of the family had long fallen into decay. Taddeo Marchioni was scarcely above the rank of his own peasants; he was ugly, avaricious, rustic, cruel. He was lord of the soil indeed, but he lived miserably, and this beautiful woman had been his wife seven years. At fifteen her father, a priest who passed as her uncle, had wedded her to Taddeo Marchioni. She had dwelt here seven mortal years in this gloomy wood, by these yellow waters, amidst these pestilential marshes.

Her marriage had made her a countess, that was all. For the rest it had consigned her, living, to a tomb.

The lives of our Italian women are gay enough in the cities, but in the country these women grow grey and pallid as the wings of the night-moth. They have no love for nature, for air, for the woods, for the fields: flowers say nothing to them. They look neither at the blossoms nor the stars. The only things which please them are a black mask and a murmur of love, a hidden meeting, the noise of the streets, the bouquets of a carnival. What should they do in the loneliness and wildness of the broad and open country—our women, who only breathe at their ease in the

obscurity of their *palco*, or under the shelter of a domino?

All the travellers who run over our land and see our women laughing with wide opened rose-red mouths upon their balconies at Berlingaccio or at Pentolaccia can never understand the immense, the inconsolable desolation of dulness which weighs on the lives of these women in the little towns of the provinces and the country houses of the hills and plains. They have the priest and the chapel; that is all.

In Italy we have no choice between the peasant woman toiling in the ploughed fields and growing black with the scorch of the sun, and bowed and aged with the burdens she bears, and the ladies who live between the alcove and the confessional, only going forth from their chambers by night as fireflies glisten, and living on secret loves and daily gossipry.

What can these do in their gaunt dull villas: they who detest the sough of the wind and the sight of a tree, who flee from a dog and scream at a tempest, who will not read, and whose only lore is the sweet science of the passions?

This I came to know later: all I saw that day, as I tramped to it, wet and cold, was the

gloomy evil shadow of the great place that had once been a fortress, the barred and shattered windows, the iron-studded doors, the grass-grown bastions.

She had made me kill Phœbus, and yet I only lived to see her face again.

Sometimes I think love is the darkest mystery of life: mere desire will not explain it, nor will the passions or the affections. You pass years amidst crowds and know naught of it; then all at once you meet a stranger's eyes, and never again are you free. That is love. Who shall say whence it comes? It is a bolt from the gods that descends from heaven and strikes us down into hell. We can do nothing.

I went home slowly, when evening fell. I had seen her eyes across the crowd in Orte once, and once across the pool that was the Vadimon, and I was hers for evermore.

Explain me that, ye wise men, who in your pride have long words for all things! Nay, you may be wise, but it is beyond you.

My mother and I spoke but little at this time. That home was a sad one; the death of the child and the absence of long years had left a chill in it. We ate together chiefly in silence: it was always

a pain to her that I was but Pipistrello the jongleur, not a steadfast, deep-rooted, well-loved citizen of Orte, with a trade to my hand and a place in church and market.

Every day she thought I should wander again; every day she knew my savings shrank in their bag; every day she heard her neighbours say, 'And your Pippo? will he not quiet down and take a wife and a calling?'

Poor mother! Other women had their sons safe stay-at-homes, wedded fathers of children, peaceable subjects of the king, smoking at their own doors after the day's work was done. She would have been so blessed had I been like them: I, who was a wrestler and a roysterer, a mere public toy that had broken down in the sight of all Orte.

My father had never failed as I had failed. He had never killed a child that trusted in his strength; he had fallen himself and died. That difference between us was always in her eyes. I saw it when I met them; and she would make little knots up of common flowers and carry them to the tiny grave of Phœbus—my victim.

Once I said to her, 'I could not help it; I

would have given my life to save him.' She only replied, 'If you had consented to bide at home, the child would be living.'

Nay, I thought, if she had not looked at me —but of that I said nothing. I kept the memory of that woman in my heart and went night and day about the lake and the river and the marshes of Sant' Aloïsa.

Once or twice I saw Taddeo Marchioni, the old count; a grey, shrunken, decrepit figure of a man, old, with a lean face and a long hard jaw; but of her, for days that lengthened into weeks, I saw nothing. There is fish in the Lagherello. I got the square huge net of our country, and set it in the water as our habit is, and watched in the sedges from dawn to eve. What I watched for was the coming of the vision I once had seen there: the fish came and went at their will for me.

One day, sick of watching vainly, and having ome good fish in the net, I dragged them out into the reeds, and pushed them in a creel, and shouldered them, and went straightway to the gloomy walls of Sant' Aloïsa. There were no gates; the sedges of the low lands went along the front of the great pile, almost touching

it. Around it were fields grey with olives; and there was neither garden nor grass-land, all had been ploughed up that was not marsh and swamp.

The great doors were close fastened. I entered boldly by a little entrance at the side, and found myself in the great naked hall of marble, empty and still and damp.

There was a woman there, old and miserable, who called her master. Taddeo Marchioni came and saw the fish, and chaffered for them with long hesitation and shrewd greed, as misers love to do, and then at last refused them; they were too dear, he said. I threw them down and said to him, 'Count, give me a stoup of wine, and they are yours.' That pleased him; he told the serving-woman to carry the fish away, and bade me follow him. He took me into a vaulted stone chamber, and poured with a niggard hand a glass of *mezzo-vino*. I looked at him: he was lean, grey, unlovely. I could have crushed him to death in one hand.

These great old villas in the lone places of Italy are usually full at least of peasant life—of women hurrying to the silkworms and the spinning and the linen-press, of barefooted men

loitering about on a thousand pleas or errands to their master. But Sant' Aloïsa was silent and empty.

Passing an open door, I saw her. She was sitting doing nothing, in a room whose faded tapestries were grey as spiders' webs; and she was beautiful as only one woman is here and there in a generation. She looked at me, and I thought she smiled.

I went out with my brain on fire and my sight dim. I only saw that smile—that sudden momentary smile whose fellow had brought death to little Phœbus.

And I felt she had known me again; though she had but seen me once in my spangled coat of velvet and silver, and now I had my legs bare to the knee, and was clad in a rough blue shirt and linen breeches, like any other country fellow upon Tiber's side.

As I was going out the serving wench plucked my sleeve and whispered to me, 'Come back a moment; she wishes to see you.'

My heart leaped, then stood still. I turned back into the house, and with trembling knees went into that chamber where the dusky tapestry mouldered on the walls.

She looked at me, sitting idly there herself in the bare melancholy room; a woman with the face of our Titian's Venus.

'Did the child die?' she asked.

I stammered something, I knew not what.

'Why did you tremble that day?' she said, with the flicker of a smile about her lovely mouth. 'You look strong—and bold.'

How the words had courage and madness enough to leap to my lips I know not; but I do know I said to her:

'You looked at me!'

She frowned a moment; then she laughed. No doubt she had known it before.

'Your nerves were not of iron then, as they should be,' she said carelessly. 'Well; the people wanted to see something die. They always do; you must know that. Bring more fish for my husband to-morrow. Now go.'

I trembled from head to foot. I had said this bold and insolent thing to her face, and she still bade me return!

No doubt, had I been a man well born, I should have fallen at her feet and sworn a mid-summer madness: I should have been emboldened to any coarse avowal—to any passionate effrontery.

But I was only a stroller—a poor ignorant soul, half Hercules, half fool. I trembled and was mute.

When the air blew about me once more I felt as if I had been drunk—drunk on that sweet yeasty wine of a new vintage which makes the brain light and foolish.

She had bidden me return.

That day my mother ate alone at home. When night fell it found me by the Lagherello. I set my nets; I slept in a shepherd's hut. I had forgotten Phœbus; I only saw her face. What was she like? I cannot tell you. She was like Titian's Venus. Go and look at it—she who plays with the little dog in the Tribune at Pitti; that one I mean.

With all that beauty half-disclosed like the bud of a pomegranate flower, she had been given to Taddeo Marchioni; and here for seven years she had dwelt, shut in stone walls.

Living so, a woman becomes a saint or a devil. Taddeo Marchioni forgot or never knew that. He left her in his chamber as he left the figures of the tapestry, till her bloom should fade like theirs, and time write wrinkles on her as it wove webs on them. He forgot—he forgot. He

was old, and slow of blood and feeble of sight; she was scarcely beautiful to him. There were a few poor peasants near, and a priest as old as Taddeo Marchioni was; and though Orte was within five miles, the sour and jealous temper of her husband shut her up in that prison-house as Pia Tolomei was shut in the house of death in the Maremna.

That night I watched impatient for the dawn. Impatient I watched the daybreak deepen into day. All the loveliness of that change was lost on me; I only counted the hours in restless haste. Poor fools! our hours are in sum so few, and yet we for ever wish them shorter, and fling them, scarcely used, behind us roughly, as a child flings his broken toys.

The sultry morning was broad and bright over the land before I dared take up such fish as had entered my *girella* in the night, and bend my steps to Sant' Aloïsa.

Fever mists hung over the cane-brakes and the reedy swamps, the earth was baked and cracked; everything looked thirsty, withered, pallid, dull, decaying: in the heats of August it is always so desolate anywhere where Tiber rolls. 'Marchioni is out,' said the old brown crone whom I had seen

the day before. 'But come in, bring your fish to Madama Flavia.'

It was a strange, gaunt wilderness of stone, this old villa of the Marchioni. It would have held hundreds of serving-men; it had as many chambers as one of the palaces down in Rome; but this old woman was all the servitor it had, and in the grand old hall, with sculptured shields upon the columns of it, and Umbrian frescoes in the roof, she spread their board, and brought them their onion-soup and their dish of *pasta*, and while they ate it looked on and muttered her talk and twirled her distaff, day after day, year after year, the same. Life is homely and frugal here, and has few graces. The ways of everyday Italian life in these grand old places are like nettles and thistles set in an old majolica vase that has had knights and angels painted on it. You know what I mean, you who know Italy. Do you remember those pictures of Vittorio Carpaccio and of Gentile? They say that is the life our Italy saw once in her cities and her villas; that is the life she wants. Sometimes, when you are all alone in these vast deserted places, the ghosts of all that pageantry pass by you, and they seem fitter than the living people for these courts and halls.

'Madama Flavia will see the fish,' said the old crone, and hobbled on that day.

Madama Flavia!

How many times has Tiber heard such a name as that breathed on a lover's mouth to the sigh of the mandoline, uttered in revel or in combat, or as a poisoner whispered it stealing to mix the drug with the wine in the goblet:—Madama Flavia: all Italy seemed in it; all love, all woe!

There is a magic in some names.

Madama Flavia!—just such a woman as this it needs would be to fitly wear such a name; a woman with low brows, and eyes that burn, and a mouth like the folded leaves that lie in the heart of a rose: a woman to kneel at morn in the black shadows of the confessional, and to go down into the crowd of masks at night, and make men drunk with love.

'Madama Flavia——'

The name (so much it said to me) halted stupidly on my lips: I stood in her presence like a foolish creature. I never before had lacked either courage or audacity: I trembled now. I had been awake all the night, gazing at the dim, dusky pile of her roof as it rose out from the

olives black against the stars; and she knew it, she knew it very well. That I saw in her face. And she was Madama Flavia; and I was Pipistrello the jongleur. What could I say to her?

I could have fallen at her feet and kissed her, or killed her; but I could not speak. No doubt I looked but a poor boor to her: a giant and a dolt.

She was leaning against a great old marble vase; leaning her hands on it, and her chin on her hands. She had some red carnations in her breast; their perfume came to me. She was surrounded by decay, dusty desolation, the barrenness of a poverty that is drearier than any of the poverty of the poor; but so might have looked Madama Lucrezia in those old days when the Borgia was God's Vicegerent.

At the haul of fish she never glanced; she gazed at me with meditation in her eyes.

'You are very strong!' she said abruptly.

At that I could do no else than laugh. It was as if she had said the ox in the yoke was strong, or the Tiber strong at flood.

'Why are you a fisherman now?' she said. 'Why do you leave your arena?'

I shuddered a little. 'Since the child fell,' I muttered; thinking she would understand the remorse that made my old beloved calling horrible to me.

'It was no fault of yours,' she said with a dreamy smile. 'They say I have the evil eye——'

'You have, madama!' I said bluntly, and then felt a choking in my throat, fearing my own rashness. Her beautiful eyes had a bright scorn in them, and a cold mockery of me.

'Why do you stay then?' she asked, and smiled at the red carnations carelessly.

'Because—rather would I die of beholding you than live shut out from sight of you,' I said in my madness. 'Madama, I am a great useless fool; I have done nothing but leap, and climb, and make a show. I am big and strong as the oxen are, but they work, and I have never worked. I have shown myself, and the people have thrown me money—a silly life, good to no man or beast. Oh yes, that I know full well now; and I have killed Phœbus because you looked at me, and my mother, who has loved me all her life, is old before her time out of my fault to her. I am a graceless fool, a mountebank. When I put

off my spangles and stand thus, you see the rude peasant that I am. And yet—in all the great, wide, crowded world I know there does not live another who could love you as I love:—seeing you twice.'

I stopped: the sound of my own voice frightened me; the dull tapestries upon the wall heaved and rocked round me. I saw her as through a mist, leaning there, with both arms on the broken marble vase.

A momentary smile passed over her face. She seemed diverted; not angered, as I feared. She had listened without protest. No doubt she knew it very well before I spoke.

'You are very strong,' she said at length. 'Strong men are always feeble—somewhere. If the Count Taddeo heard you he would——'

Then some sudden fancy struck her, and she laughed aloud, her bright red lips all tremulous and convulsed with laughter.

'What could he do? You could crush him in one hand—as you could crush a newt! Poor Taddeo! did he not beat your fish down, give you watered wine, the rinsings of the barrel, yesterday? That is Taddeo always!'

She laughed again, but there was something so cruel in that laughter that it held me mute. I dared not speak to her. I stood there stupidly. 'Do you know that he is rich?' she said abruptly, gnawing with her lovely teeth the jagged leaf of one of her carnations. 'Yes, he is rich, Taddeo. That is why my father, who was a priest, sold me to him. Taddeo is rich: he has gold in the ground, in the trees, in the rafters and the stones of the house; he has gold in Roman banks, he has gold in foreign scrip, and in ships, and in jewels, and in leases; he is rich. And he lives like a grey spider in a cellar corner. He shuts me up here. We eat black bread, we see no living soul; once in the year or so I go to Orte or to Penna. And I am twenty-three years old, and I can read my own face in the mirror! ——' She paused; her breast heaved, her beautiful low brows drew together in bitter fury at her fate: she had no thought of me. I waited, mute. I did not dare to speak.

It was all true; she was the wife of Taddeo Marchioni, shut here as in a prison, with her youth passing and her loveliness unseen, and her angry soul consuming itself in its own fires. I loved her: what use was that to her, a man

who had nought in all the world but the strength of his sinews and muscles?

She remembered me suddenly, and gave me a gesture of dismissal.

'Take your fish to the woman—I cannot pay you for them: I have never as much as a bronze coin; but—you may come back another day. Bring more—bring more.'

Then with a more imperious gesture she made me leave her. I stumbled out of the old dark close-shuttered house into the burning brilliancy of the August day, giddy with passion and with hope. She knew I loved her and yet she bade me return.

I know not how much, how little that may mean in other lands; but here in Italy it has but one language. Language enough to make a lover's heart leap like the wild goat. Yet hope is perhaps too great a word, to measure rightly the timid joy that filled my breast. I lay in the shepherd's hut wide awake that night, hearing the frogs croak from the Lagherello, and the crickets sing in the hot darkness. The hut was empty: shepherd and sheep and dogs were all gone up to the higher grounds amongst the hills. There were some dry fern plants in a corner

of it. I lay on these and stared at the planets above me, throbbing in the intense blue of the skies: they seemed to throb, they seemed alive.

A mile away, between me and the stars, was the grand black pile of Sant' Aloïsa.

Christ! it was strange! I had led a rough life—I had been no saint. I had always been ready for jest, or dance, or intrigue with a pretty woman, and sometimes women far above me had cast their eyes down on the arena, as in Spain ladies do in the bullring, to pick a lover out thence for his strength; but I had never cared. I had loved, laughed, and wandered away with the stroller's happy liberty; but I had never cared. Now all at once the whole world seemed dead: dead heaven and earth, and only one woman's two eyes left living in the universe; living and looking into my soul and burning it to ashes.

Do you know what I mean?—No?—Ay, then you know not love.

All the night I lay awake: the short hot night when the western gold of sunset scarce has faded into dark—when the east seems to glow luminous and transparent with the dawn. Ah! the sunrise!—I shall see it once more, only once more! I shall see it through those bars,

a hand's breadth of it above Tiber, no more; and when again it spreads its rosy warmth over the sky and reddens the river and the plain, I shall be dead—a headless thing pushed away under the earth and lime; and over my brain and skull the wise men will peer with knife and scalpel, and pour the plaster over its bones to take a cast, and say most likely to one another, as I heard them say once before a cast in a museum, 'A good face, a fair brow, fine lines: strange that he should have been a murderer!' Well! so be it! Even though I lived for fourscore years and ten, the sun nevermore would rise for me as it rose before Phœbus died.

At that time I lived only to see a shadow on the barred windows, a hand open a lattice, a veiled head glide by through the moonbeams. I was wretched, yet never had I been so happy. The bolt of the gods stuns as it falls, but it intoxicates also.

I had been such a fool—such a fool. When she had said so much I had said nothing: that last moment haunted me with unending pain. If I had been bolder—if I had only known what to answer—if I had only seized her in my arms and kissed her. It would have been better to

have had that one moment and have died for it, than to have been turned out of her presence like a poor cowardly clod.

I cannot tell how the long hot days went on; they were days of drouth and drought to the land, but they were days of paradise to me. The fever mists were heavy, and the peasants sickened. Tiber was low and had fœtid odours as its yellow shallows dried up in the sun; clouds of gnats hovered over the Lagherello and its beds of rushes, and the sullen wind blew always from the south-east, bringing the desert sand with it. But to me this sickly summer was so fair, I continued to live in the absent shepherd's empty hut. I continued to net the fish when I could; and now and again I saw her.

I only lived in the hope of seeing her face. She had the evil eye. Well, let it rest on me and bring me all woe, so that only I could live in its light one day!—so I said in my madness, not knowing.

I must have looked mad at that time to the few scattered peasants about the pool. I lived on a handful of maize, a crust of bread. I cast my nets in the water, and once or twice went up to Sant' Aloïsa with the small fish and was sent away by the crone Marietta. August passed, and

the time drew nigh for the gathering of the grapes, ripe here sooner than in the Lombard and the Tuscan plains. But the vintage of Sant' Aloïsa was slight, for the ground was covered with olives in nearly every part. When they were stripping what few poor vines there were I offered myself for that work. I thought so I might behold her. There was no mirth on the lands of Taddeo Marchioni; the people were poor and dull. Fever that came from the river and the swamps had lessened their numbers by death and weakened those who were living: my strength was welcome to those sickly and ague-stricken creatures.

The day of the gathering was very hot: no rain had fallen. The oxen in the wains were merely skin and bone; their tongues were parched and swollen in their muzzled mouths. The grass had been long all burnt up, and the beasts famished: it was everywhere wretched, stifling, the air pregnant with storm.

Amidst the sear and arid fields, and the woods, black and grey, of ilex and of olive, the great old square house rose before us, pale, solitary, mysterious; a mausoleum that shut in living creatures: it terrified me.

Night fell as the last waggon, loaded with the

last casks of grapes, rolled slowly with heavy grinding wheels towards the cellars of Sant' Aloïsa.

With the waggon there were a few men enfeebled with fever, a few women shivering with ague. I walked behind the waggon, pushing it to aid the weary oxen.

It was nightfall. There was no moon; here and there a torch flickered in a copper sconce filled with oil. The courtyard and the cellar were of enormous size; in the old times Sant' Aloïsa had sheltered fifteen hundred men. In the darkness where a torch flared when he passed I saw now and then Taddeo Marchioni coming and going; screaming an order in his high thin voice; swearing sometimes, always suspecting some theft.

He did not see me. He was entirely absorbed in his vintage and in the rebukes he hurled at his peasants.

I drew back into the shadow, leaning against the column of the gateway, a huge wall blackened with time and damp. The bell of the old clock-tower sounded the fourth hour of the night. All at once the servant Marietta muttered in my ear—

'Go in; she wants to speak with you. Go in to the tapestry room on the other side of the house; you remember.'

My blood bounded in my veins. I asked nothing better of fate. I glided along the old walls, leaving the central court and the master there absorbed in his work, and I found with some difficulty the little side door by which I had entered the house before. I trembled from head to foot, as in that hour. I felt myself all at once to be ugly, heavy, stupid, a brute to frighten any woman, sweating from the labours of the day, covered with dust, poor and frightful in my rough hempen shirt, with my naked legs and my bare knees impregnated with the juice of the grapes;—and I dared to love this woman—I! Loved her, though she had slain Phœbus.

My mind was all in confusion; I was no longer master of myself. I scarcely drew breath. My head was giddy; I staggered as I went along those endless galleries and passages, as I had done that day when Phœbus had fallen on the sand of my arena. At last I reached, how I knew not, the room of the *arazzi*, scarcely lighted by a lamp of bronze that hung from the ceiling by a chain. In the twilight I saw the woman with the fatal gaze, with the lips of rose, with the features of Lucrezia, of Venus, the woman who in all ages has destroyed man.

Then I forgot that I was a labourer, a peasant, a juggler, a wrestler, a vagabond—that I was clad in coarse linen of hemp, that I was dirty and filthy and ignorant and coarse. I forgot myself; I only remembered my love—my love immense as the sky, omnipotent as deity.

I fell on my knees before her.

I only cried with stifled voice, 'I am yours; I am yours.'

I did not even ask her to be mine. I was her slave, her tool, her servitor, her thing, to be cherished or rejected as she would. I shivered, I sobbed. I had never known before, it seemed to me, what love could be; and it made a madman of me.

All the while she said nothing: she let me kiss her gown, her feet, the stone floor on which she stood.

Suddenly and abruptly she said only:

'You are a droll creature: you love me—really—you?'

Then I spoke, beside myself the while. I remember nothing that I said; she heard me in silence, standing erect above me where I kneeled.

The light was very faint, the lamp swung to and fro on its bronze chains; I only saw the eyes

of the woman burning their will into mine. She bent her head slightly; her voice was very low, she said only, 'I have known it a long time: yes; you love me, but how? How?'

How? I knew no words that could tell her. Human tongues never have language enough for that. A look can tell it. I looked at her. She trembled for a moment as though I had hurt her. Soon she regained her empire over herself.

'But how?' she muttered very low, bending over me her beautiful head, nearly touching mine. 'But how? Enough to——?'

She paused. Enough? Enough for what? Enough to deny heaven, to defy hell, to brave death and torment, to do all that a man could do;—who could do more?

'And I love you; I.'

She murmured the words very low; the evening wind which touches the roses was never softer than her voice. She brushed my hair with her lips.

'I love you,' she repeated. 'For you are strong; you are strong.'

Kneeling before her there, I took her in my arms. I drew her close to me; I drank the wine of paradise; wine that makes men mad. But

she stopped me, drew herself away from me, yet gently, without wrath.

'No,' she said, 'not yet; not yet.'

Then she added lower still:

'You must deserve me.'

Deserve her? I did not comprehend. I knew well that I did not deserve my joy, poor fool that I was: mere man of the people, with the tressels of the village fair for all my royal throne. But since she loved me, a crowd of ideas confused and giddy thronged on my brain and whirled madly together. Up above in the belfries and the towers in my infancy, with the clear blue air about me and the peopled world at my feet, I had dreamed so many foolish gracious things; things heroical, fantastical, woven from the legends of saints and the poems of wandering minstrels. When she spoke to me thus, these old beautiful fancies came back to my memory. If she wished me to become a soldier for her sake, I thought——.

She looked at me, burning my soul with her eyes, that grew sombre yet brilliant, like the Tiber water lighted by a golden moon.

'You must deserve me,' she repeated. 'You must deliver me. You are strong.'

'I am ready,' I answered. I was still kneeling before her. I had at my throat a rude cross that my mother had hung there in my childish years. I touched the cross with my right hand, in sign of oath and steadfastness.

'I am ready,' I said to her. 'What do you wish?'

She answered:

'You must free me. You are strong.

Even then I did not understand.

'Free!' I repeated. 'You would fly with me?'

She gave a gesture superb, impatient, contemptuous. She drew herself backward and more erect. Her eyes had a terrible brilliancy in them. She was so beautiful; but as fierce in that hour as the wild beast that I saw once at a fair break from its cage and descend amidst the people, and which I strangled in my arms unaided.

She murmured through her closed teeth:

'You must kill him. You are strong.'

With a bound I rose to my feet. In the burning night an icy cold chilled my blood, my limbs, my heart.

Kill him? Whom? The old man? I, young and strong as I was, and his wife's lover?

I looked at her.

What will be the scaffold to-morrow to me since I have lived through that moment?

She looked at me always with her sorceress' eyes.

'You must kill him,' she said briefly. 'It will be so easy to you. If you love me it will be done. If not—farewell.'

A horrible terror seized on me. I said nothing. I was stupefied. The gloomy shadows of the chamber surrounded us like a mystic vapour; the pale figures of the tapestries seemed like the ghosts arisen from the grave to witness against us; the oppressive heat of the night hour lay on our heads like an iron hand.

A phantom parted us.

The spectre of a cowardly crime had come between us.

'You do not love me,' she said slowly. She grew impatient, angered, feverish; a dumb rage began to work in her. She had no fear.

I drew my breath with effort. It seemed as if some one were strangling me.

Kill him? Kill him?

These ghastly words re-echoed in my ears. Kill an old and feeble man?

It was worse than a crime. It was cowardice.

'You do not love me!' she repeated with utter scorn. 'Go—go!'

A cry to her sprang from my very soul.

'Anything else, anything but that! Ask my own life, and you shall have it.'

'I ask what I wish.'

As she answered me thus she drew herself in all her full height upward under the faint radiance from the lamp. Her magnificent beauty shone in it like a grand white flower of the *datura* under the suns of autumn. A disdain without bounds, without limit, without mercy, gleamed from her eyes. She despised me—a man of the people, a public wrestler, a bravo, only made to kill at his mistress's order, only of use to draw the stiletto in secrecy at the whim and will of a woman.

I was Italian; yet I dared not slay a feeble old man in the soft dark of a summer night, to find my reward on the breast of his wife!

Silence fell between us.

Her eyes of scorn glanced over me, and all her beauty tempted me, and cried to me,

'Kill, kill, kill—and all this is thine!'

Then her eyes filled with tears, her proud loveliness grew humble, and, a supplicant, she stretched out her arms to me; she cried:

'Ah! You love me not; you have no pity. I may live and die here; you will not save me. You are strong as the lions are; you are so strong, and yet you are afraid.'

I shook in all my limbs. Yes, I was afraid—I was afraid of her, afraid of myself. I shivered; she looked at me always, her burning eyes now humid and soft with tears.

'In open war, in combat, all you wish,' I said to her slowly. 'But an old man—in secret—to be his assassin——'

My voice failed me. I saw the light in the lamp that swung above oscillating between us; it seemed to me like the frail life of Taddeo Marchioni that swung on a thread at our will.

She drew herself upward once more. Her tears were burned up in the fires of a terrible dumb rage. She cried aloud, 'You are a coward. Go!'

I fell once more at her feet. I seized her by her gown; I kissed her feet.

'Any other thing!' I cried to her in my

anguish, 'any other thing! But the life of a weak old man—it would be horrible. I am not a coward; I am brave. It is for cowards to kill the feeble. I cannot. And you would not wish it? No, no. You would not wish it? It is a dream, a nightmare. It is not possible. I adore you. I adore you. I am a madman. I am yours. I give you my life; I give you my body and my soul. But to kill a feeble old man that I could crush in my arms as a fly is stifled in wine. No, no, no! any other thing, any other thing. But not that.'

She thrust me from her with her foot.

'That or nothing,' she said coldly.

The sweat fell from my brow in the agony of this horrible hour. I was ready to give my life for her, but an old man—a murder done in secret—all my soul revolted.

'But you love me!' I cried to her; and a great sob rose in my throat.

'You refuse to do this thing?' she answered.

'Yes.'

Then she threw me away from her with the strength of a tigress.

'Imbecile! You thought I loved you? I should have used you. That is all.'

The lamp went out; the darkness was complete. I stretched my hands out, to meet but empty air; if I were alone I could not tell; I touched nothing, I heard nothing, I saw nothing.

A strange giddiness came upon me; my limbs trembled under the weight of my body, and gave way; I lost consciousness. It is what we call in this country a stroke of the blood.

When my senses revived I opened my eyes. It was still night about me, but a pallid light shone into the chamber; for the moon had risen, and its rays penetrated through the iron bars of the high windows. I remembered all.

I rose with pain and effort; the heavy fall on the stone floor had bruised and strained me. A great stupor, the stupor of horror, had fallen upon me. I felt all at once old; quite old.

The thought of my mother passed through my mind for the first time for many days. My poor mother!

By the light of the moon I tried to find my way out of this chamber—a chamber accursed. I gained the entrance of the gallery. Silence reigned everywhere. I could not tell what hour it was. The lustre from the skies sufficed to illumine fitfully the vast and sombre passages. I

found the door by which I had entered the house, and I felt the hot air of the night blow upon my forehead, as hot now as it had been at noonday.

I passed into the great open court. Above it hung the moon, late risen, round, yellow, luminous. I looked upward at it; this familiar object seemed to me a strange and unknown thing.

I walked slowly across the pavement of the courtyard on a sheer instinct, as you may see a wounded dog walk, bearing death in him.

I traversed the breadth of the court. My heart seemed like a stone in my breast; my blood seemed like ice in my veins. All around me were the walls of Sant' Aloïsa, silent, grey, austere.

My foot touched something on the ground. I looked at it. It was a thing without form; a block of oak-wood or a slab of marble. Yet I looked at it, and my eyes were rooted there and could not look elsewhere.

The moon shed a sinister white light upon this thing. I looked long; standing there motionless and without power to move. Then I saw what it was, this shapeless thing: it was the body of Taddeo Marchioni; dead, horribly dead; fallen face downward, stretched out upon the

stones, a knife plunged into the back of the throat and left there.

He had been stabbed from behind.

I looked. I saw. I understood. It was her act.

I stooped; I touched the corpse; I turned the face to the light; I searched for a pulse of life, a breath. There was none. He was dead. A single blow had been given, and the blow had been sure. A ghastly grimace distended the thin lips of the toothless mouth; the eyes were starting from their orbits; the hands were clenched: it had been a death swift, silent, violent, terrible.

I drew out the knife, deep buried in the bone of the throat below the skull. It was my knife; the same with which I had slashed asunder the boughs of the vines in the day just gone in the vintage-fields.

She had taken it, no doubt, from my girdle when I had fallen at her feet.

'I understand,' I said to the dead man. 'It is her work.'

The dead mouth seemed to laugh.

A casement opened on the court. A voice cried aloud. The voice was hers; it cried for help. From the silent dwelling came a sound

of hurrying feet; the flame of a torch borne in a peasant's hand fell red on the livid moonlight.

She came with naked feet, with unloosed hair, as though roused from her bed, beautiful in her disarray, and crying aloud:

'An assassin! an assassin!'

I understood all.

She meant to send me to the scaffold in her place.

It was my knife, indeed; it would be enough testimony for a tribunal. Justice is blind.

She cried aloud; they seized me; and the dead man lay between us, stretched on the stones and bathed in blood.

I looked at her: she did not tremble.

But she had forgotten that I was strong; strong with the strength of the lion, of the bull, of the eagle. She had forgotten.

With a gesture, I flung far away from me, against the walls, the men who had seized me; with a bound I sprang upon her. I took her in my arms in her naked loveliness, scarcely veiled by the disordered linen, by the loosened hair, and shining like marble in the glisten of the moon.

I seized her in my arms; I kissed her on her

lips; I pressed against my heart her beautiful white bosom. Then between her two breasts I plunged my knife, red with the blood of her dead lord.

'I avenge Phœbus,' I said to her.

Now you know why to-morrow they will kill me; why my mother is mad.

Hush! I am tired.

Let me sleep in peace.

* * * *

And on the morrow he slept.

FAME.

It was a brilliant and gay day in Munich. It was the beginning of a Bavarian summer, with the great plain like a sea of grass with flowers for its foam, and the distant Alps of Tyrol and Vorarlberg clearly seen in warm, transparent, buoyant weather.

Down by the winding ways of the river there were birch and beechen thickets in glory of leaf; big water-lilies spread their white beauty against the old black timbers of the water-mills; and in the quaint, ancient places of the old streets, under the gables and beams, pots of basil, and strings of green peas, and baskets of sweet-smelling gilly-flowers and other fragrant old-fashioned things, blossomed wherever there was a breadth of blue

sky over them or a maiden's hand within; whilst above the towers and steeples, above the clanging bells of the Domkirche and the melon-shaped crest of the Frauenkirche, and all the cupolas and spires and minarets in which the city abounds, the pigeons went whirling and wheeling from five at sunrise to seven of sunset, flocks of grey and blue and black and white, happy as only birds can be, and as only birds can be when they are doves of Venice or of Munich, with all the city's hearths and homes for their granaries, and with the sun and the clouds for their royal estate.

In the wide, dull new town it was dusty and hot; the big squares were empty and garish-looking; the blistering frescoes on the buildings were gaudy and out of place; the porticos and friezes were naked and staring, and wanted all that belongs to them in Italy. All the deep, intense shadows, the sultry air, the sense of immeasurable space and of unending light, the half-naked figures graceful as a plume of maize, the vast projecting roofs, the spouts of tossing water, the brown bare-foot straw-plaiter passing in a broad path of sunshine, the old bronze lamp above the painted shrine, the gateway framing the ethereal landscape of amethystine horizons

and silvery olive ways,—they want all these, do these classic porticos and pediments of Italy, and they seem to stare, conscious of a discordance and a lack of harmony in the German air. But in the old town there is beauty still; in the timbered house-fronts, in the barred and sculptured casements, in the mighty gables, in the gilded and pictured signs, in the sunburnt walls, in the grey churches, in the furriers' stalls, in the toysellers' workshops, in the beetling fortresses, in the picturesque waysides, here is the old Munich of the Minnesingers and master masons, of the burghers and the *burschen*, of the Schefflertanz, and of the merry Christchild Fair. And old Munich keeps all to itself, whether with winter snow on its eaves, or summer leaves in its lattices, and here the maidens still wear coloured kerchiefs on their heads and clattering shoes on their feet; and here the students still look like etchings for old ballads, with long hair on their shoulders and grey cloaks worn jauntily; and here something of the odour and aspect of the Middle Ages lingers as about an illuminated roll of vellum that has lain long put away and forgotten in a desk, with faded rose-leaves and a miniature that has no name.

The Munich of builder-king Ludwig is grand, no doubt, and tedious and utterly out of place, with mountains of marble and granite, and acres of canvas more or less divine, and vast straight streets that make one weep from weariness, and frescoed walls with nude women that seem to shiver in the bitter Alpine winds; it is great, no doubt, but ponderously unlovely, like the bronze Bavaria that looks over the plain, who can hold six men in her head, but can never get fire in her eyes nor meaning in her mouth—clumsy Athenæ-Artemis that she is.

New Munich, striving to be Athens or Rome, is monotonous and tiresome, but old Munich is quaint and humble, and historical and romancical, with its wooden pavements under foot, and its clouds of doves above head; indeed, has so much beauty of its own, like any old painted Missal or golden goblet of the *moyen âge*, that it seems incredible to think that any man could ever have had the heart to send the hammers of masons against it, and set up bald walls of plaster in its stead. Wandering in old Munich—there is not much of it left, alas!—is like reading a black-letter ballad about Henry the Lion or Kaiser Max; it has sombre nooks and corners, bright gleams

of stained casements, bold oriels, and sculptured shields, arcades and arches, towers and turrets, light and shade, harmony and irregularity, all, in a word, that old cities have, and old Teutonic cities beyond all others; and when the Metzgersprung is in full riot round the Marienplatz, or on Corpus Christi day, when the King and the Court and the Church, the guilds and the senate and the magistracy, all go humbly through the flower-strewn streets, it is easy to forget the present and to think that one is still in the old days with the monks, who gave their name to it, tranquil in their work-rooms and the sound of battle all over the lands around them.

It was the Corpus Christi day in Munich now, and the whole city, the new and the old, had hung itself with garlands and draperies, with pictures and evergreens, with flags and tapestries, and the grand procession had passed to and from the church, and the archbishop had blessed the people, and the king had bared his handsome head to the sun and the Holy Ghost, and it was all over for the year, and the people were all happy and satisfied and sure that God was with them and their town; especially the people of the old quarters, who most loved and clung to

these ceremonials and feasts; good God-fearing families, labouring hard, living honestly and wholesomely, gay also in a quiet, mirthful, innocent fashion—much such people as their forefathers were before them, in days when Gustavus Adolphus called their city the golden saddle on the lean horse.

The lean horse, by which he meant the sterile plains, which yield little except hay, looks rich with verdure in the mellow afternoon light, when midsummer is come and the whole populace, men, women, and children, on Sundays and feast-days pour out of the city gates eagerly to their own little festivities under the cherry-trees of the little blue and white coffee-houses along the course of the river, when the beanflowers are in bloom. For out of the old city you go easily beyond the walls to the grey glacier water of 'Isar rolling rapidly,' not red with blood now as after Hohenlinden, but brilliant and boisterous always, with washerwomen leaning over it with bare arms, and dogs wading where rushes and dams break the current, and the hay blowing breast-high along the banks, and the students chasing the girls through it, and every now and then upon the wind the music of a guitar, light and dancing, or

sad and slow, according as goes the heart of the player that tunes it. At this season Bavaria grows green, and all is fresh and radiant. Outside the town all the country is a sheet of cherry-blossom and of clover. Night and day, carts full of merry-makers rattle out under the alders to the dancing places amongst the pastures, or to the *Sommer-frischen* of their country friends. Whoever has a kreuzer to spend will have a draft of beer and a whiff of the lilac-scented air, and the old will sit down and smoke their painted pipes under the eaves of their favourite *Gasthof*, and the young will roam with their best-loved maidens through the shadows of the Anlagen, or still farther on under the high beech trees of Gross-hesslohe.

This day, beyond all others, they went so, both young and old. It was the *Frohnleichnamsfest* —a day on which not to rejoice, not to go out in the air, not to be in company with some other living soul, was indeed to be strange and unlike your kind, was indeed to be alone in the midst of the peopled and busy world

Christian Winter was so alone.

He stood by the lattice of his attic, and looked down on the hastening, happy throngs, aloof from

them as he had been aloof from happiness all his life. He was thinking of the days of his youth.

The room he lived in was in the outskirts of the town, beyond the Isar Thor. It was in the basement of an old lofty wooden house, full of families, like a rookery of birds. All the people that lived in it were very poor. It had a long garden behind it, a tangled growth of grasses, with old apple-trees long past bearing, and a horse-chestnut or two. In front of it ran the road, with its green trees, and, beyond the road, the river, always beautiful, turbulent, and grey-green like the sea.

Christian Winter leaned over his wooden window-sill, and watched the townspeople go by, and was hungry and would not own it, and had no shirt underneath his threadbare coat because he had but one in the world, and that was in the washtub. He was a handsome and tall old man. His head was snow-white, and his aquiline features were brown, and fine, and noble in outline. He stooped a good deal, because he was often weak from age, and from not having food enough to nourish the tired muscles and the worn tissues of age. And he was very lean; so lean that you could see through his hand if it were held up

against the sun. But he was a fine old man still; if he had not been too proud he might still have earned money perhaps in the ateliers as a model for Belisarius at the gate, or Lear in the storm, or Calas at the scaffold.

But he was proud, and he was a painter still; only the world had done with him, would never hear of him, would never even know that he had ever lived. Why? He could not tell. Fame has its caprices, and its awards are often alike withheld and allotted with an odd captiousness and cruelty that seems to laugh at men; accident, lack of opportunity, diffidence, want of friends, or perhaps the mere incapability to compel success, one or the other, or all together, had kept him obscure, neglected, nameless, and yet he was a painter still, and never in his long and lonely years had been able to force himself to become anything else.

He was thinking of his life to-day as he stood and saw the merry stream of others' lives pour out under the green trees by the seething glacier waters. It had been always his fate to stand by thus and see the tide of the world roll past him, as the tides of the holiday crowd and of the grey Isar river were rolling now. He was thinking of

his youth, his eager restless youth, full of dreams, whose beauty of illusion even the dull roar of the cannon of Jena or of Wagram had had little power to break. He had been only a poor lad, a coppersmith's son, here in Munich; one among many, and beaten and cursed at home very often for mooning over folly when others were hard at work. But he had minded neither curse nor blow. He had always said to himself, 'I am a painter.' Whilst camps were soaked with blood and echoing only the trumpets of war, he had only seen the sweet divine smile of Art. He had gone barefoot to Italy for love of it, and had studied, and laboured, and worshipped, and been full of the fever of great effort and content with the sublime peace of conscious power. He had believed in himself: it is much. But it is not all. As years had slid away and the world of men would not believe in him, this noble faith in himself grew a weary and bitter thing. One shadow climbed the hills of the long years with him and was always by his side: this constant companion was Failure.

Fame is very capricious, but Failure is seldom inconstant. Where it once clings, there it tarries.

Why did he fail? Why did the nation never

heed him? Why did his canvases grow grey with unstirred cobwebs, because no one heeded them, no one would glance at them? He could not tell. Perhaps because he was too proud, and no one will let poverty be proud. Perhaps because he had never known the way of climbing to high place on his knees through dust. Perhaps because he had been always mistaken in this one belief of his, and he had had no genius in him after all. Who can tell? He could not.

He was seventy-five years old this day of Corpus Christi. It was so long, long ago since he had departed from his father's house with a loaf and a few groschen in his wallet, setting his face southwards, and saying to himself, 'I will be a painter.' It was so long, long ago, more than half a century; and yet men had never once in all that time had on their lips the name of Christian Winter.

He had wrought his heart out in his pictures, and no one had ever cared to look on them. He had lived hardly, suffering cold, and hunger and pain, lived without men's mirth and women's tenderness, sacrificed his nights and his days and his manhood to Art; and yet the world knew nothing of him. He drew on copper for print-

sellers to get his daily bread, and could not even get much of that to do; for in the humblest grades of art there were men younger, or more fortunate, or more preferred. He had a cold, hard manner with him, born from perpetual misfortune, that repelled others; so they said. He did not deny it; it might be so, he knew. When the north wind blows always, can the glaciers melt if they would?

There is a terrible etching by François Chifflard of the great state-barge of Art, with the dead and the drowning men in the deep waters under its prow; Christian Winter had been one of the many that could never reach the fair ship's side he had been always in the deep waters, only he never had gone under them—quite; they had done their best to drown him, but he had never yielded up his soul.

Only now he was weary, very weary; he was seventy-five years old, and he had not a friend on earth, and had to work for the daily food that tasted so bitter to him.

Once he had sworn that the name of Christian Winter should be written in gold on the gates of his native city; but men—or fate—had been stronger than he, and when Christian Winter

should be written anywhere it would be only on the black board above a pauper's grave, if even it were written there, which was scarcely likely.

He did not mourn for himself; he cared for the visions that would die with him, the lovely and beloved things which his eyes had always beheld, but which men had never allowed him to portray for them.

The merry crowds ran on underneath; there were laughter and music on the air, and the joyous barking of dogs and the shouts of children. He stood in his garret and gazed down on them; he had not eaten for many hours, no printseller had wanted him for weeks, and his last coin had been spent days before.

There were many canvases, many panels, it is true, for he had dwelt in this garret thirty years, and he had often gone without bread and meat to buy colours and oil. But none would purchase these, the follies of an old unknown man—worthless as the spiders that undisturbed wove their webs around them. Nay, almost as many years as he had lived in this garret he had ceased even to show or to offer them. What was the use?

In his daring and dreamful youth, and in the force and the fruitfulness of his manhood, the

world had always despised and rejected him; in his lonely old age he was too proud to cry out, 'I am forgotten!'

He was, of course, forgotten, as a sere leaf is forgotten by the hurrying feet that tread on it, and never know it is in the dust.

As he stood by the attic window, looking downward, a smile crossed his stern face one moment, and faded as quickly as a gleam of sun fades on a winter's morning when the sky is full of snow. He had seen a smile on a girl's uplifted, happy, innocent face. She was down amidst the throng, a pretty white and golden thing, with a knot of roses at her throat, and a young lover beside her. She was the daughter of the house; very poor, like all under that roof, but joyous and fresh and gay; a tender, harmless creature, who sang all day long like a bird, upstairs and down, shut in at her spinning-wheel and her household work, as out under the white lilies in the old garden.

Christian Winter, seeing her, smiled; seeing her, half a century rolled back, and he thought of a maiden who once had wandered with him by the same grey glacier water, and who now for so many years—so many he could not count them—

had lain under the earth by the wall of an old brown church.

Lili looked up and laughed; she was afraid of him usually, but this Corpus Christi day she was so happy, she was as bold as any lioness. Berthold was with her; her beautiful, brave, ambitious Berthold, who was to be betrothed to her if he gained the prize—as he was sure to gain it—in the strife for the King's fresh frescoes that had been thrown open to all Bavarian art students of a certain high talent and standing, such as all agreed to allow to her Berthold.

Berthold was only a student, indeed, but he was the nephew of a Nürnberg glass-stainer of merit, and had the making of a famous man in him, the city said; and her father had agreed with his uncle that if he could win the King's commission he should have also the rose and white love of his fancy. So Berthold and Lili went by under the avenue on Corpus Christi day, with his big brown hound before them, to play at ball in the flowering meadows, and at night together to hear 'Siegfried,' as all good Bavarians feel it alike their joy and their religion to do.

Berthold and Lili were happy as the doves that flew above their path, and Christian Winter

looked down on them, with seventy-five years on his bowed head, and hunger in his body gnawing like a wolf. But he did not feel bitter against their happiness—he had a great nature; he only thought to himself, 'Why is youth so short and age so long?'

Then he turned from the window, as if the sight of the merry crowd in the afternoon light hurt him, and sat down and broke his fast for the first time that day. He had found a piece of bread, cast aside in the street as he had walked home, and had taken it up, there being no one there to dispute it—not even a dog. It was stale and damp, but it was bread. He ate it, wondering why he lived—he—whilst day after day there went by so many to the burial-places—little pale children with flowers on their breasts, and maidens, and young wives, and men dead in their strength—all whom the world wished to keep.

The light faded, the day passed; the faint, red glow of the sunset came across the waters. His garret was dark before it was evening. He sat still, and let the shadows close around him; he had been in the shadow all his life. It was very likely that his end would soon come—of hunger; it was a thousand chances to one that he

would find half a loaf again, and money he had none, and he would take no charity.

Had it been his fault?

He was a humble man before his God in his own conscience, though a proud man to men. He told himself that the fault must have been with himself, somewhere. Perhaps he had always deceived himself, and the world had been right and he wrong; perhaps he had not had genius.

The evening closed in quite; there was still a glow on the river; there were still the hum of laughing throngs and the sound of distant music. He was alone in the dark.

A knock came at his door. He said, wearily, 'Come in.' No one ever came there unless it was the woman who washed his shirt to tease for the kreutzer owing her. The door opened slowly, and as if pushed by a timid hand. The small fair head of a girl peeped in. It was little Lili in her Frohnleichnamsfest bravery with the cluster of June roses at her throat. She had a little tray in her hand, with some white bread and slices of ham on it, and a flagon of bright beer.

'Herr Winter,' she said very shyly, 'we are at supper downstairs, and we are so happy, and we thought perhaps you—you are all alone, and

you never take the trouble to order anything, and I—I——'

She stopped and coloured scarlet, and pushed the tray timidly on to the edge of the deal table. She knew very well that he was starving, and she wanted to hide that she knew it; but she was only sixteen years old, and was not very skilled in disguises.

Christian Winter reddened, too, with shame and anger, through his pale withered skin. He had suffered many things all his life, but he had never complained, and never had obtained or asked for pity. He motioned the tray away—not roughly, because a girl had brought it—but resolutely.

'You mean a kindness,' he said briefly; 'but, thank you, *mein Fräulein*, I have supped.'

The girl's blue eyes filled with tears.

'You are angry!'

'No, my dear, you mean well, I want for nothing.'

'Why should you be so unkind and so proud?' she said timidly and pettishly, both in one. 'It is such a trifling thing, and it would please me so.'

Christian Winter smiled a little; he had been

in the house at the time of her birth, and had seen her grow up a pretty, merry, honest little girl, loving her frolic and dances under the cherry-trees, and her night at the opera; but loving quite as well to spin and knit by the stove, and attend to her father's welfare.

'It would please me that you should take it back,' he said more gently. 'You are a good little maiden, Lili, and I hope that your lover will be worthy of you. Good-night.'

Then he put her out of the room, not ungently, with her tray, and closed the door upon himself and darkness.

'And I know he is starving!' sobbed the girl to herself as she moved down the stairs to the kitchen, where it was all light and bright and merry, and green boughs were hanging under the lamps, and the voice of her Berthold was singing to the sweet chords of a zither.

They were all poor enough, as the world counts riches, but they seemed to Lili rich in all the world could give, compared with that isolated, famishing, silent old man in the dark garret against the stars.

'Oh, if ever thou shouldst be like that,

Berthold mine!' she murmured. 'He was a painter too.'

Berthold smiled; a handsome, stalwart, clear-eyed man, who had been always accounted amidst the cleverest and quietest students in the schools of Munich.

Berthold laughed in the contemptuous confidence of his youth. 'There is not much fear of that,' he said. He had youth's profound scorn for failure. And he meant to live and die on the lips of men like Kaulbach. He was twenty-three years old; he was clever; and he was in love. Life seemed to him like a fair mistress who never could be faithless. He was very poor, but that did not matter much; in ten years, he said, he would be very rich. He meant to win the King's order for the frescoes of the new gateway that was to be called Tannhäuser Thor, and whoever should win that greatness would have fame.

A year had been given for the designing of the cartoon. The competition was free to any Bavarian subject. It was an ambitious thing for him to attempt, for many already celebrated Bavarian painters would compete for it, but there was nothing to prevent the merest student lad from winning it if he could. The year had ex-

pired, all but a few weeks. Berthold's designs were done; vast cartoons in black and white, that covered the four walls of his barn-like attic. He believed in them with all the sanguine certainty that was his natural temper. No one had been allowed to see them except little white and rose Lili, who, of course, believed in them too, even more intensely and rapturously than he did himself, and her father, who knew nothing at all of such things.

When it was rumoured amongst the students that he intended to compete, it was deemed a bold thing to do, but it was like Berthold, they said. Berthold had that calm, contemptuous confidence in his own power which usually compels the success that it desires. He was a very clever draughtsman, and had borne prizes off easily in the school. That he would fail here seemed to him impossible. His heart was set upon it, and he was vain.

It was a pity that he was vain, but it was almost his only fault. He was a brave, truthful, high-spirited lad, born to decent parents in the heart of the green Baierischen Wald, and accustomed to live hardly from the time he was in the cradle, and his father, who had been a Jäger

in the great woods, had died in a mortal fray with eagles, his eyes being torn out by one that he had robbed of her young. But vain he was; not of his good looks nor his stalwart frame, not of the staunch industry with which he had worked his way through student life in Munich, but of his genius as a painter. Of that he had no doubt.

'Might I bring the old man, if I could, to see thy great studies?' little Lili asked him that evening, and he laughed.

'The old man? The one that starves up there and yet would not share your rolls? What can he know, or what can his ideas be worth? He has failed all his life. Nobody has ever heard of him. He has plodded on all his days.'

'There are beautiful things in his garret,' said Lili with timidity; for she was a little afraid of her masterful and ambitious lover.

'With the cobwebs all over them, I suppose?' laughed her Berthold.

'Yes. The cobwebs are very thick; that is because there are none to dust for him,' said Lili, who did not see the jest.

She had been always afraid, too, of the great, silent, melancholy man, who had seemed to her always so old—so old even when she had been a

tiny child in her mother's arms. But she was attached to him also from habit and from pity, as she was to the old grim-grey watch-dog that had been there also in her infancy.

Berthold laughed and kissed her, and struck the chords of his guitar.

'No cobwebs shall be woven over the things I create; that I promise you!' he said, with proud certainty in his own future—the same certainty that Christian Winter had felt half a century before.

Lili could not laugh. The memory of that dark, lonely, cheerless garret under the roof chilled her and made her sad.

Berthold Landsee left her at ten o'clock that night; her father would have no late hours in his house; the night was brilliant, and all the city was astir under the stars. Lili went to her little bed, but her lover, though he loved her well, was not one to gaze at the stars above for her sake. He fell in with some fellow-students when the moonrays were sparkling on the waters of the pretty Fischbrunnen; they were merry-making, and he joined them; they went to a dancing-garden, he with them. They all danced till the moon began to fade into the clear gold of

dawn. There was no harm in it; it was simple sportive Bavarian mirth, such as need not have angered even Lili had she known of it. But at the close of it, in the bright daybreak, the others brawled; there was a quarrel and a riot; a student struck Berthold in the mouth; Berthold felled him to the ground; they went into a corner of the dancing-place, where the lilac trees grew thickest, and fought with sabres in furious, savage, student fashion. At sunrise Berthold was a dying man, with the clotted blood matting his fair curls, and his bold eyes closed in stupor.

Sunrise found Christian Winter sitting by his deal table as he had sat all night. He had not gone to bed; he had sat on there, lost in the gloom of his thoughts, and a heavy painful sleep had overtaken him in that cramped and comfortless posture. When he awoke the redness of early day was on the Isar water in lieu of that of evening, and down below in the garden Lili's birds were beginning their song. He arose stiff and cold; the unstilled hunger gnawing in his chest; the pains of age aching in his bones. Why did he go on living? Because he was by nature very patient; because also, in a simple child-like

way, this God-forgotten man had faith in a God.

He would not take his own life, though each breath of it was a pang.

He rose and thought with terror of the day—the long, solitary, hunger-stricken day stretching out before him as the waste of the desert before the stricken traveller; but to bring relief by a death of his own seeking did not occur to him, any more than to leave his post occurs to a faithful sentinel, be the night ever so long and the vigil ever so weary.

He rose and washed, buttoned his frayed-worn garments over his shirtless breast, and went with feeble, slow steps down into the open air. He meant to go the round of the town once more, trying to find some one who wanted some work done, such as he could do with the wood-block or the etching-needle. His sight was as clear as in his youth, and his touch was as delicate and as strong.

He went out and walked with bent head, and steps not very firm, along the road to the city, through the Isar Thor and along the Thal towards Marienplatz, where one of the people lived who still, occasionally, gave him work in the illustra-

tion of cheap books and papers. As he went under the arch of the old Rathhaus he paused to look at the beauty of the place in the early morning, with the shadows deep on the quaint arcades, and the sunrays catching the glory and grace of Mary's Column. Marienplatz is always beautiful like an illuminated page out of an old Romance of the Rose or legend of the Sangreal, and its beauty touched the aged man always the more deeply because there he had seen first the only woman he had ever loved—the woman who, for so many years, had lain dead under the brown church-wall.

There was no one scarcely risen; a few of the folks in the old arcades were opening their shutters, and the guard was changing at the new Rathhaus; that was all. But as he paused there came from under the entrance to the Passage Schüssel into the square some men bearing a rough litter. He had to move aside to let it pass. As he did so he saw the uncovered features of the wounded man they bore, and saw that they were those of Berthold Landsee.

For a moment he did nothing. People always passed him by; he had grown out of the habit of taking any interest in them; and then, suddenly, a memory of Lili's little rose and white face came

across him. 'Poor child!' he muttered to himself, and followed the litter.

Berthold's home was in an old tumble-down high house in the Berg Gasse, and Christian Winter was soon there, almost as soon as the bearers of the litter.

'Is he wounded badly?' he asked them, and they told him so wounded that there was hardly any hope of his life.

He went up to Berthold's room. It was a garret like his own, but very spacious; its lattices looking on to the old historical roofs of the Alte Hof. There the bearers laid the youth insensible on his truckle bed, and others ran for a surgeon.

Christian Winter sat by the bed and waited; he cared nothing for the vain and imperious young man, but his heart ached for poor little Lili.

When the surgeons came they looked grave. The sword blade had severed the skull. He was senseless now; if he did not die in a moment or in an hour, he would be delirious with brain fever. There was very little hope.

Who would attend to him? The comrades of his frolics were too selfish, the people of the house too busy; his uncle was in Nürnberg; his mother

was far away in the green mountains by the Achen Pass.

'I will see to him,' said Christian Winter coldly; and he said to himself, 'Lili shall not know it while he lives.'

He had seen the little rosy, golden-haired thing about the place where he dwelt ever since her infancy, and she had thought of him in the night just passed, thought of him and his hunger in the midst of all her happiness. To the man who had been forgotten by all the world for fifty years it seemed so strange and so sweet that he blessed her for it. If he could save her lover, he would.

They sent and told Lili's father, and he came in haste and grief, and they agreed to keep the terrible story from her as long as they could, and to tell her he had been called to his mother in the Wald. If she missed the old man from his attic, her father agreed to tell her also that Christian Winter had gone to Salzburg to try for work.

Meanwhile the handsome Berthold lay insensible to all that went on around him, with his fair curls shorn and his pillows dark with blood. All his bright ambitions and his gallant vanities were crushed into nothingness:—his life had

ended in a stupid *Biergarten* brawl. There was little to be done for him, except to watch and wait, to pour broth between his teeth every two hours, and to keep ice on his head. His eyes never closed; they stared wide open, dull and sightless. Christian Winter sat beside him and did what there was to do.

In the long vacant hours his hands were empty, and he looked, as an artist always looks at any thing of art, at the cartoons for the Tannhäuser Thor. It was morning before he noticed them; then with his shaded lamp he slowly examined them one by one, line by line.

'There is no soul in them,' he muttered, and he set down his lamp and frowned; a sullen mechanical art made him angered like an insult to heaven; and these were soulless; their drawing was fine, their anatomy faultless, their proportions and perspective excellent; but there all merit ended. They were worse than faulty—they were commonplace. There is no sin in Art so deadly as that.

All the night long Christian Winter sat and looked at them, angered against them, surprised and pained. Could youth, with all its inheritance, all its strength, all its sanguine powers, do no

better than that? 'If it were not for the child that loves you, you were best dead,' he thought, as he glanced at the senseless face of Berthold; and yet he was sorry for the young man, for those cartoons would never be singled out for the honour of the German people.

Never! Christian Winter, who all his life long had studied all that was highest and greatest in his art, knew very well that these great drawings were valueless in the contest where they were to be sent as conquerors.

'They will never win; they have nothing in them to compel success or touch the emotions of the people,' he said to himself, and he knew that the young man, if he ever awoke to consciousness again, would awake to find his vanity face to face with that failure he had derided.

A day and a night and another day went by; there was no change in the state of Berthold. His surgeon said that when there came a change it would be to delirium or death. Meanwhile, watching there in that loneliness and gloom, a thought came to Christian Winter.

The instincts of the artist thrilled in him, as the old war-horse remembers war. The cartoons offended, they hurt, they infuriated him; they had

nothing to say. They were mechanically perfect, perhaps, but what of that? They had no originality, they had no poetry, they had no mind in them; they were stupid and silent as the mechanical repetitions of an oleograph. He looked at them till he could bear it no longer. The temptation became too strong for him. There were many square metres of good unspoiled grey paper ready stretched there, for Berthold had won purses in the schools, and could afford not to stint himself in the materials of his labours. Alone in this high chamber, with the materials lying ready to his hand, he could resist his impulse no more. He raised a great blank surface of paper against one of the walls and began to draw.

When it was needful he went to the sick bed, and did what was required of him gently; when he was free and alone he returned to his labours; when any one entered he hid what he was doing. All the old, sweet habits, the imperious dominion of art, took empire over him. It had been years since he had been able to enjoy the luxury of imagination and execution. He had never for a long time been rich enough to buy what was wanted to do any great work. Moreover, his heart had been too sad and too weary. But now

all the long pent-up forces and fancies that age and privation had imprisoned in him, but had never chilled, broke up as the glacier at spring-tide breaks up into the bursting torrent.

Half a century before—long ere Wagner had made it a household word—the story of Tannhäuser had been dear to him. In his youth and his manhood he had often taken its themes for those works which the world had already rejected. All its stories grew under his hand now as the green spring world grows out from under the snow. Day and night, day and night he laboured in the labour that is gladder and grander than joy, and, like joy, is a trance.

He was rarely disturbed. The surgeon came morning and evening; now and then a student knocked. Berthold himself lay still and mute as a felled tree, knowing nothing. In two weeks he had done more than the youth had accomplished in a year's time. He had created anew and accomplished the six cartoons for the frescoes; the forms in them life-size, and the black and white giving all that power, that shadow and light, that colour, in a word, which only the hand of a master can infuse in it. On the fifteenth day he gazed on his work, and knew that it was good.

There was soul in *these.*

Alone in the chamber, except for the scarcely breathing form upon the low bed, he stood with his lighted lamp, and gazed on his own creations. All his long years through men had refused to believe in him, but once more he revolted against their verdict, and believed in himself.

He put the lamp down, and the glow of triumph passed off his pale, stern face.

'Would I rob the lad while he is dying?' he thought.

Would he close his own long life with a victory that would be an infamy?

The morrow was the day appointed for the sending in of the cartoons.

He sat down by the bed of Berthold, and the lamplight fell on the staring dull eyes and the white wasted face of the youth; the day must go against him as it would—he in the glory and strength of his manhood was powerless.

The garret was quite silent; the sounds of the city rose muffled and dim. A hand tapped at the door. It was the hand of Lili's father.

'How is he?' he asked softly.

Christian Winter rose and put his lips to the keyhole, 'The same always.'

'Ah, dear God! And my Lili thinking him in the Achen Pass all the while! Only she grows disquieted. To-morrow is the day for the cartoons to go in. Will you send his in for him? They are there ready, and they are sure to win the prize.'

'Yes, I will send them in for him.'

'That is good. I will tell her his friends are doing it. When there comes a change you will send to me? Good night.'

'Good night.'

A heavy step went down the creaking stairs. Christian Winter was alone again; alone with that force of temptation which men symbolise in Satan.

When the dawn broke he stood before his own cartoons and looked at them with the slow salt tears of a man who never had wept for friend or foe, for hunger or for pain.

They were sublimely beautiful, and he knew it. All the great genius dormant under the force of cruel circumstances so long here sprang up full-armed as from enchanted sleep, and asserted itself in one supreme, majestic effort. From the lover asleep upon the breast of his temptress to the solitary figure spurned from heaven and earth,

fleeing back over the snow to eternal ruin, all in his creation was great, and its creator knew it.

He gazed long, as the faint daybreak streamed through the garret; then he kissed them, even as an old man might have kissed his children's children on his deathbed

A little later he called up strong street-carriers into the attic, and bade them bear the cartoons safely to the Maximilianeum, where judgment would be given. There was no fear of awakening Berthold; he knew nothing that passed around him, and a cannon fired in his ear would not have aroused the stunned brain to any consciousness of life.

Christian Winter had carefully marked his own cartoons and those of the youth with different signs and numbers; he sent them both; and with them two sealed envelopes also numbered and bearing severally the same two signs.

When the steps of the porters had passed away, and the roll of the waggon they had brought for the great drawings had passed away also down the Berg Gasse, the old man fell on his knees and hid his face upon his hands.

He had chosen his martyrdom.

The next day Berthold was delirious. The

stupor had given way to brain fever; the surgeons said that, he being very strong, it was possible, though not likely, he would survive. Christian Winter nursed him with gentleness and skill. When the wandering brain, striving in the dark after lost memories, made the youth mutter of his cartoons—of the contest—of the award—the old man laid his hand gently on his burning forehead, and murmured soothingly, 'Yes, yes; the prize is yours; do not fear.'

The answer always stilled Berthold, for the time at least; though the surgeons affirmed that he could have no true consciousness of it. But who knows?

Delirium is like death—a desert without a sun or a star.

The cartoons remained shut in a chamber of the public hall allotted to them for ten days. During that time the judges chosen from the Kunstverein examined them. At the end of the tenth day the award was to be made, and the hall in the Maximilianeum thrown open to the public, with the selected drawings alone shown there previous to their transference in fresco to the new gates of the city.

On the night of the tenth day an official of

the Kunstverein brought a letter to the garret of Berthold.

Christian Winter took it and smiled—a strange smile, the man who brought it fancied.

Christian Winter gave one glance at the envelope, with the arms of the city and the crown of the king upon it, and knew its errand.

One was chosen, and he knew which one.

The light swam before his sight; he grasped the lintel of the door to save himself from falling.

The messenger only saw in him a feeble old man who seemed blind.

'The student Berthold Landsee is ill,' he said to the bearer of the letter. 'But I am his friend —I can take the letter.'

'You? And he will not know the glory he has got? Ah! that is very cruel,' said the bearer of the epistle.

'He will know it when he is well,' said the old man calmly; and called to a young boy of the house playing on the stairs, 'Run swift beyond the Isar Thor,' he said to the child. 'Go, tell Lili and her father that Berthold has won the prize!'

The child ran, throwing his cap in the air

for triumph and glee, because one that had lived in his mother's house was so great.

On his bed the youth was tossing and striving, flinging his arms above his head, and muttering discordant phrases.

Christian Winter, whose face was white as the plains in winter, went to him, and laid his hand on the lad's head with the customary gesture that calmed him.

'Berthold, be still: thou hast won.'

A ray of light darted into the blazing, wandering eyes; the dulled, heated brain caught some sense in the words, and struggled to apprehend more; his lips parted.

'Won?' he gasped, and started upward, still blindly and wondering.

'Thou hast won,' said Christian Winter again.

The youth gave a great sigh; his head fell back on his pillow; a little smile played about his mouth.

When the surgeon came he found him sleeping.

'I can leave him with the house-woman for half an hour,' said Christian Winter. 'He will live now, and I need to go out.'

'Go in peace,' said the surgeon. 'He will live.'

Christian Winter went down the stairs out into the street, and took his way towards the Maximilianeum. The day had all the brilliancy of August, for more than a month had gone by since the Frohnleichnamsfest. It was four in the afternoon; the streets were thronged; the green leaves of the trees quivered in the sunlight; the noble buildings of the Maximilian Strasse were gay with awnings and tapestries and banners and armorial shields, for the next day was the birthday of the young king, and he had come into the city from the Roseninsel that morning. But the crowds were not thinking then of the king; they were all hurrying towards the Maximilianeum.

'The cartoons!' one cried to another. 'The Tannhäuser cartoons!'

And they were breathless, and eager, and rapturous, as only the crowd of an art city can be on any theme of art. No one noticed the pale, gaunt old man with pale face and bent head, who went with them, pushed and thrust back very often, upwards to where the great build-

ing was throned upon the Gasteinhöhe, with all the sunlight on it, and the blue summer sky above.

There were already crowds upon the steps and in the outer halls, and they were one and all calling aloud one name—Berthold Landsee.

'Bavarian-born! Another Kaulbach!'

So they shouted; and the whisper ran from one to another that the artist was sick unto death, wounded and delirious, and might never know his triumph, and the multitude thrilled with all that tender, evanescent, sincere, and shallow sympathy of the mob that kisses the feet of an idol one moment and the next spits in his face.

'A young man, so young, they say, and yet so great!' cried a woman, as Christian Winter passed her. He smiled slightly, as he had smiled when he had seen the messenger come to the door.

He went with the throngs that were growing quieter and a little in awe as they came near where sentinels were stationed to keep the press backwards from the room where the cartoons were hung. At the entrance of the chamber he paused and looked over the heads of the people.

for though he stooped he was still of no common stature. He saw, as he had known that he should see, the cartoons of his own hand.

And the voices around him only murmured from one to another, 'Berthold Landsee! Berthold Landsee!'

He stood and looked as they looked, and said nothing; only there was a mist before his eyes.

A man was standing by him, who murmured, 'The work is very great. A new prophet has risen among us. To have drawn these is fame enough.'

And the speaker was Wilhelm Kaulbach.

He himself still said nothing, but left the cartoons hanging there in the full glow of the sunrays, and went away, and down into the press of the people unnoticed.

They were the life of his life, but what of that? He had given them to another.

At the foot of the wide stairs there was a little rose and white maiden, half fainting, bareheaded, and trying to force her way, with little timid hands outstretched. At the sight of him she gave a sigh and fell against his breast.

'Oh! is it true? is it true?' she cried.

'Has my Berthold been murdered, and are they praising him in there—crowning him, crowning him!—and he dead? Is it true?'

Christian Winter lifted her up and drew her away from the pressure of the throng.

'Your Berthold is living—he has been a little hurt, but it will soon be nothing. Yes; they have crowned him in there. He has triumphed!'

'Is it true?' she murmured, and pressed her white, frightened face against the old man's bosom; 'oh, tell me the truth—all the truth; I will bear it.'

Christian Winter looked down on her still with the same smile, like some faint light shining more clearly ere it fades away quite into darkness.

'Tell you the truth? He will live, and they have made him victor in there. Only, Lili—listen, and try to remember—he had two sets of designs; I sent in both. One—the one you saw—was rejected; one—the one you never saw—has been chosen. He has been delirious, and the wound in his head will have made him forget many things. You must tell him when he recovers quite, that though he may have forgotten it, he designed the cartoons which they are

flocking yonder to see. That is all you will remember, dear; after long delirium people forget what they have done, very strangely. That is all. God be with you and your lover.'

Then he put her towards her father, who for a moment had been parted from her in the rush of the crowd up the steps, and he went on his way back alone along the golden radiance of the street of Maximilian.

He did not go to Berthold: he went home—home to the lonely bed—the empty plate—the dull forgotten life.

He sat down, and the same smile was upon his face.

'So this is fame, at last!' he said, and the great tears rolled slowly from his eyes. He closed them and tried to sleep.

When they sought him late that night he was sitting in his chair, dead.

Berthold Landsee never understood why it was that he had forgotten in his fever drawing those strange cartoons. Now and then some glimmer of the truth drifted across his fancy, but he shrank from the thought and buried it with the dead. He is a great man, though some

say that he has not fulfilled the promise of his youth.

In a little graveyard on the Isar water there is an obscure grave lettered 'Christian Winter.' Lili goes there to keep its roses fresh.

She goes alone, for her lover when he became famous ceased to be faithful.

That is all.

THE MARRIAGE PLATE.

It was a very old plate—old as the hills; or so the people thought; one of those sacred plates, with a circular well in the centre to hold sweetmeats, which were called marriage plates in the old time, and were painted for brave bridal festivities by Maestro Georgio and Orazio Fontane, and all their lesser brother artists in Urbino and Gubbio, Pesaro and Pavia, Castelli and Savona, Faenza and Ferrara, and all the other art towns, where the ceramic painters dwelt in peace amidst the turmoil of tumultuous ages.

It hung, framed in a round worm-eaten bit of wood, on a rusty nail, amongst the dried herbs and the kitchen ware in the house of Giudetta Bernacco, and it was an article of faith with Giudetta and all her kith and kin that it must

never be touched or evil would come; dust all round it they might, but touch it never. That it brought good luck hanging there, and would bring evil if removed, they believed as devoutly as they did in their priests and their saints. If asked why, they said because they did so—their fathers had done so before them; a reason strong enough to satisfy the most sceptical inquiry.

Giudetta would cross herself sometimes when she looked at the plate as if it were a *pietà*.

'It brings good fortune,' she would say always.

She was over eighty years of age. She had lost her husband in her youth; her two sons had been killed—one in battle the other by lightning. She had known sickness, sorrow, privation, pain of all kinds, summer and winter; still she thought the plate brought good fortune. 'I have lived to bring up Faello,' she would say, and think all mercies of Heaven comprised in that phrase.

Faello (Raffaelle) was her grandson, the only male left of her stock, though a tribe of his little sisters had clustered round the soup-pot, and grown up with him; rosy, vigorous little maidens, strong as donkeys, and useful indoors and out, as Tuscan country girls always are from

their infancy. Faello was a youth now, manly and strong, handsome and robust, honest and brave, and the obedient right-hand of his grandmother. Their cottage stood on a wind-swept hill, just underneath the village of Impruneta; their sole wealth was a mule and a cart, and their means of livelihood came from carrying to and fro the city the earthen vases and pots for which Impruneta is famous. Giudetta, when Faello was a baby, and her sons were both dead, had been obliged to keep a lad to drive the mule, and had had many a weary hour, and terrible trouble to keep the soup-pot full for all the tumbling babies, and woollen clothes on their little bodies in the hard winter times; but now Faello for a space of four years had been old enough to be trusted with this labour, and so the carrying of the pots was now all profit. The little stout maidens plaited straw, fetched water, hoed the plot of ground, gathered firewood in the firwoods, and cut fodder for the mules. They managed to live, and had a bit of meat sometimes for Sundays and feast days.

'The saints are so good to us,' would Giudetta say in all seriousness and content, 'and the plate brings fair fortune, you know.'

Faello and all his sisters were in great awe and reverence of the Marriage Plate. It was curiously painted in polychrome, like most of these plates, with a scriptural theme—the nuptials of Rebecca and of Isaac; all the personages were in sixteenth century garb, and the whole was brilliant with those iridescent hues, those reflections as of mother-of-pearl and of gold, of which these early artists had the mastery. A motto ran round its outer rim in black letters, and the bridegroom offered to his bride a shield emblazoned with many gorgeous quarterings and the coronet of a duke.

They could hardly see it, hung up in the dark over a dresser, as it was, with bundles of dried marjoram and thyme, but now and then they held a lamp up to it and saw the light glow on the colours, and the black letter inscription, which they could not read, and then would tremble as Giudetta told them how it had been always there in her father's father's time, and of how some did say that they themselves came of the great family whose coronet and arms were on it; not but what that was nonsense, no doubt.

Was it nonsense? thought Faello; he did

not much care, but he was a proud silent boy, and was called 'superbo' by his comrades, because he never was much inclined to drink and play and go trapping birds on Sundays, and chatter at the wineshop doors through summer nights as they did. Faello got up while the east was still dark, harnessed his mule, and walked in with his loads of red lemon-vases and amphoræ for oil and water. He was serious and steady, and loved his grandmother, his young sisters, and his dog Pastore. Perhaps in his heart he put Pastore first. Pastore was one of the many beautiful white sheep dogs of the country; dogs that would adorn a palace, and might lie on a queen's robes; dogs that are the very *beau idéal* of their race, brave, gentle, generous, and full of grace, very perfect knights of dogs, such as would become the idols of Fashion were that Lady of Caprice ever to wander up our solitary pine-clad crests and through our high-climbing olive orchards.

Faello and Pastore had passed many a happy year together. On working days, side by side, they walked into the town, their fifteen miles of dust or mud. When Faello went into a place of business Pastore sat outside by the mule's

head to guard the cart and the cart's load. At evening they went back again, inside the cart that time; at night Pastore slept in the mule's stable, and guarded mule and master. When there were no vases to be carried, they went higher up into the woods and loaded the cart with the firewood cut there, or the bracken and ling which labourers and brickmakers burn in their ovens, and carried these down into the town for the foresters. At other seasons they would take loads of hay or straw; but whatever the season was, one of the mules and Faello and Pastore went down the long, stony, steep hill every day together, for it was only thus that they could keep the soup-pot full and the wolf from the door. The wolf was terribly near sometimes, especially when the fresh grist tax came, and the hand of the State snatched at the bread of the poorest of the poor. But the wolf never came quite indoors. 'It is the blessed Marriage Plate,' said Giudetta. 'It is the mules and me,' thought Faello, and then was afraid that the thought was wicked, for he was a reverential and dutiful lad. A handsome lad too, as Giudetta thought proudly, when she looked at him in his clean saints'-day shirt, with a flower be-

hind his ear, and the sun shining in his large brown eyes and on his gleaming auburn locks.

Girls thought so, too, and cast their glances up at him as they went by with bent heads plaiting their tresses of straw. He did not look in return; these fancies had not touched him; he was always hard at work; he had his sisters for handmaidens, and for companion and friend, Pastore.

'When I am going to mass Pastore never stirs; he looks at my feet and knows that I have my boots on,' Faello would say, with pride, of his playfellow. Faello never committed the foolish extravagance of boots except as a mark of respect to the high altar. His firm and shapely feet trod the earth unflinching, but from his boots they flinched very much.

It would seem to the great world a life dreary enough, to go day after day, all the year round, in sunshine and storms, in foul weather and fair, up and down a long hilly road with a mule and its load. But it was not dreary to Faello. He had a sort of soul in him, this boy who could not read or write; the awful rose of dawn, which he saw so well from his hill-side home, was beautiful to him; he loved to hear the deep bells of the

monastery as he passed underneath its pile; he had a vague perception of the loveliness of the flower he put behind his ear, of the canes he cut by the brook side, of the silence of the pine woods as he gathered his load. It was not much, but it was enough to make him half sad and half happy; enough to keep him from guile and from folly; and then, in time to preserve him from both of these, or at least from the last, at an age when it might have assailed him, old Giudetta died almost suddenly, as the very old do, the life going out like the low flame of a lamp that is spent.

She was sitting on her settle by the fire at Ceppo (Christmastide), and fell back never to rise again.

As Faello caught her, and the terrified children clustered round her, she lifted her trembling finger to the wall, where the Marriage Plate hung.

'Never move it,' she muttered. 'Never move it. Promise ——'

'I promise,' murmured Faello, paralysed with the awe of that strange look which he saw on her face, and which yet he did not know was death.

Giudetta nodded her head, and her hands

clasped them, and moved feebly about her rosary of wooden beads. Then she opened her eyes with effort, and struggled to speak.

'Unless the dear God were to wish it ——' she said.

She was afraid to seem to wish what God did not; and at that moment, as Faello kissed her, she died; and thus ended another of the innumerable simple, cleanly, honest, toilsome lives of pain and love, that are swept away like the dead leaves by the winds in autumn.

Faello was just eighteen.

He had been born on Christmas Day.

All night long he sobbed on his rough bed. The next night the body was borne up the hill to its grave, the children bearing torches, that blew about in the chill windy air, and shed their red gleam on the snow.

On the morrow he rose and harnessed the mules. The poor have no time for the luxury of grief.

Without the brave old pious spirit in his house, Faello felt lost. The little there was, he and his sisters inherited. The cottage they rented; but the things in it, and the cart and the mules, were their own. Candida and Vina,

the two elder girls, were old enough to keep domestic matters as they had been; but to Faello nothing seemed the same. The honest, brown, homely face, withered like a winter apple, had been before him from his birth. Faello, missing it, would go into the stable at supper-time and weep his very heart out, with his arms round the neck of Pastore. Pastore understood him better than his sisters.

The little maidens were good children, and had sorrowed sincerely, yet they were half glad to be alone, to have the dignity of housewives, to have no one to scold them when they lingered at the well, or did their plaiting badly; and Candida put on the brass and glass bead necklace which the pedlar had given her at last autumn's fair, and which her grandmother had forbidden her to wear.

For two weeks and more Faello never noticed it upon her. When he did at last, he went up quietly, unclasped it, and threw it in the well.

'Shall we cease to obey *la Nonna* because she is dead?' he said. 'See Pastore,' he added, more gently, 'he never comes nearer the fire than she allowed him; and, when he is wet, dries himself in the straw before he enters, as she taught him. Shall we think less of her than he thinks?'

The child wept. Pastore got up from his corner, and rubbed his soft white cheek against hers to dry her tears.

Pastore loved them all with that infinite forgiving tenderness of which dogs and a few women are capable. They were good to him. He very often indeed had not enough to eat, but then they themselves had not either. They were very gentle with him, and he lived in the house like one of them; seeing his brethren beaten, kicked, starved, chained, and left out in the bitter snow-storms of the winter nights, Pastore, in his dog's way, thought his home was heaven.

And his young master loved him with a great love. Whenever he had had a holiday in any of the nine years since Pastore first had come to him —a round ball of white wool three months old— Pastore had been his playmate and comrade in preference to any other, and had rambled with him along the chain of hills, covered with oak and sweet chestnut scrub, and with the tall pines spreading their green plumes against the blue sky. Now, Faello had no heart for any holiday; he felt the burden of life on his young shoulders; whilst his grandmother lived he had never known care. Now, night and day he was always thinking:

'If I cannot earn enough to keep the children always as she did?' For the little maidens were five in number, and wanted more and more as they grew older and older, and nobody makes much money carrying vases and pots and firewood for other people. The money goes to the potters and the woodsellers.

Moreover, Giudetta had known how to keep the cock and the hens in full health; had known how to fatten a pig; had known how to fill a soup-pot with the mushrooms and sweet herbs of the wild places; had known a hundred ways of saving money; which the little maidens, if they knew, forgot, or else did ill. The hens sickened, or did not lay; the pig remained lean; the soup-pot boiled over, or else cost too much, and once had a mushroom in it that made them all sick; the spiders began to appear, the dust to gather, the chimney to smoke, the cabbages to get the worm. The little girls meant well, but they were very careless, and Candida sulked for her necklace in the well.

The heart of Faello grew very sad.

'You should take a wife, Faello; it would keep your sisters in order,' said the neighbours. Faello coloured, for he had never had such a

thought put before him; but he answered, quickly and shortly—

'When my sisters are all married, perhaps.'

The youngest, Toinetta, was seven years old; the neighbours laughed, and nicknamed him Il Frate, the monk. But Faello did not laugh.

There was a maiden—just this last month or two—who had looked at him as he passed her; not furtively, as did the others, but openly, yet sweetly, with clear blue eyes that made him think of the Madonnas in the King's Galleries down in the City.

He had never spoken to her, nor would have thought of speaking to her. She was the daughter of one of the master potters, whose huge red jars he bore down into Florence, and she had but lately come from a convent where she had been reared and taught delicate handworks. She was as far removed from him as if she had been a noble's daughter, still he loved to think of her—as he thought of the saints. That was all.

Once she had patted Pastore.

Faello had kissed Pastore where her hand had rested, and then had coloured foolishly.

Now in this sweet spring weather—when

these sweet blue eyes glanced at him one day, and ever afterwards he saw them in the blue of the sky above and the blue of the myosotis by the brooks—a sore trouble fell upon him. One of his mules died, and a little later the other broke its leg and had to be slain on the road. It was almost as great a loss to Faello as if his own feet had been hewn off; without his mules his power of working was gone. He had no money to buy another. The priest tried to get a trifling sum together to help him, but the people would not give. He was young, they said; there were many wanted more than he, and they all wanted so much themselves. Even the master potters whom he had served would not aid him. He had to hire a mule, but the day's hire almost swallowed up the day's wage. The soup-pot was almost empty, or only simmered with a few herbs and a little parsley in the water. Faello himself only ate bread, and as little of even this as he could, that he might not send Pastore starving to bed.

One day, a saint's-day, when he was at home, a man came by, and, asking for a draught of water, said, 'I think you have a curious old plate: may I see it?'

'Surely,' said Faello, and pointed at it on the wall.

The man was about to take it down, but Faello stopped him: 'You must not do so. We never touch it.'

'Never touch it?' said the man, not comprehending, and got leave to light a lamp-wick and look at it.

'It is odd and old; I will give you five francs for it,' he said, as he blew the light out. Faello answered, 'It is not to be sold.' 'Nonsense,' said the man; 'it is of no use hanging there; say ten.' Faello shook his head.

The man slowly bid twenty, twenty-five, thirty, forty, and so on, till, in half an hour's time, he had reached the offer of a sum of one hundred francs. 'A hundred francs!' Faello shivered with longing. It would buy a mule. But he still shook his head and answered, 'It is not to be sold.' The man flung himself out of the door in a fury and fume.

He was an antiquity-dealer from the city, and had recognised the plate as old Urbin ware of the finest sort and design.

'The wooden-headed young madman!' said the dealer, with the favourite Tuscan curse.

'What can he want with a Marriage Plate on his wall? May an apoplexy take him!'

But no apoplexy took Faello, although he went down through the dust in the torrid heats of the summer every day, and only lived on a lump of bread and an onion, and a cup-full of bad *mezzo-vino*. Even these he could ill afford, for the previous autumn's vintage had been a bad one, and the best wine was a franc a flask, which means that it is only for the rich.

It was a very curious thing, but after that dealer had gone away in dudgeon several other people came to ask to look at the Marriage Plate, and offered various sums to part with it. It never occurred to Faello that the dealer might have sent them, but he felt the temptation sorely. The mule was but a poor beast which he hired, and the hire of it ran away with nearly all his gains, but he gave them all the same answer, and when he knelt and said his Aves by his grandmother's unmarked grave, in the little white-walled burial place on the hill, he could say with a clear conscience, '*Nonna mia, ia contenta.*'

The master potter's daughter used to go to the burial place also, for her mother lay there.

Once or twice Faello saw her and lifted his hat to her, she being one of his employer's family; but he did not dare look at her; as he did it that once, he felt his heart beat so that he could scarcely breathe. A little later on, he ventured, in her absence, to lay some blue *fleur des lys* on her mother's grave; he wondered if she knew who put them there—but how should she know? The blue lilies had no tongue.

She never spoke to him: she only spoke to Pastore, who, since she had patted him that one day, always ran up to her whenever he saw her near.

'Dea is a pretty girl, and will have a nice nest egg for her dower,' Faello heard the neighbours say once in the evening time, when work was done and the stars were out, and those stars of earth, the fireflies, were illuminating hill and dale, and clustering in the corn.

'Ay, she is a pretty girl,' said another; 'they do talk of Tista up yonder for her.'

Gian Battista was a young Fattore, comely and well-to-do, who rode fine frisking horses, and in winter wore velveteen, and in summer white jean clothes; he had his home at a grey old tower on a neighbouring hill, and was the dandy and hero of the district.

Faello, listening, felt as if all the light of the stars and the fireflies went out, and left the whole earth grey and dark. Yet what was it to him? Whether for Gian Battista or not, Dea could never be for himself: Dea, with her soft forget-me-not eyes, and her blond tresses, and her string of pearls at her throat, and her dower of a good five thousand francs, not to speak of linen.

His fate would always be to see her go by his house—just that and nothing more.

He had to keep the wolf from the door, and the soup-pot full for the five little hungry mouths.

Her father even never noticed him, except to leave him a rough order, or pay him on a Saturday night. Faello was one of the carters—nothing more. Ser Baldassare lived in a house with green blinds and wore a gold watch, and was quite a great man, as greatness is counted up at Impruneta. People said he could fill a dozen of his own big red pots with French banknotes and not be poor; but perhaps this was exaggeration.

Anyhow, he was a very great man in the eyes of Faello, who humbly carried into the town for him those huge, round-bellied jars, and earthen

pots as big as brewers' vats in England, which made so brave a fortune for Dea and her three brothers.

It was a lovely summer time—warm, of course, but refreshed with heavy rains often at nightfall. All the harvests were abundant—wheat, oats and barley; hay was cut several times, and the promises of vine and of olive alike were good for the future. But the plenty around did not cross Faello's threshold.

Since Giudetta had died, there seemed no end to the troubles of the poor little household. Candida, the eldest, fell sick almost to death of the ball in the throat (diphtheria), and when, at last, she recovered, was weak and useless, and said that if she had had the necklace that had gone down the well, her throat never would have been bad;—she was not of a very logical brain, and loved a little bit of finery, being pretty and fifteen years old. The pig that had been ill so long at last made its mind up and died; five hens were stolen from the hen-roost one early morning ere Pastore and Faello had got a mile away down the road; little Toinetta broke her ankle climbing up a cherry-tree, and the three middle ones, left under this burden of sickness and work, kept the

house but ill, and found the washing of linen, and the cleaning of floors, and the various daily tasks all too much for them. When Faello came home at sunset he had to set to and sweep, and hoe the plot of ground, and even go and wash his own shirts at the women's washing-tank, which more than all made him ashamed, because he felt so ridiculous. The neighbours, indeed, were not unkind, but Giudetta had been always called a proud stomach, as Faello was called after her, and pride, when you are poor, is a thing nobody ever can forgive you—very naturally.

Now and then Faello looked reproachfully up at the Marriage Plate, which was always to bring them fair fortune, and never did so. But to take it down and sell it never occurred to him for an instant. He would as soon have thought of tearing open his granddame's coffin to take the marriage ring off her finger and the linen shroud off her limbs.

Sometimes when he was hoeing, or was washing at the tank in the red glow of evening, he would see Gian Battista go by on his brave grey horse, and would hear people laugh and cry, 'Ay, ay, he goes courting to Ser Baldassare; he knows the way to win Dea.'

Then Faello's heart would sink as a stone sinks in deep waters, and it would seem to him for a moment as if he never could bear the many burdens of his life. But such moments passed; in the morning he would go to work again; he was brave, and by nature patient.

One day in hot August he rose as usual, and went and got into his cart as the first tinge of rose blushed in the east above the opposite mountain. Pastore jumped on him as they went forth to their labour; hungry, both of them, for they never ate till mid-day, and then not one-half that either needed. Faello went to the potter's yard and found an unusually large load awaiting him there. There had come a great order for flower pots, large and small, from a nursery garden down in the city. There was also another errand.

The foreman gave him a little packet, sealed.

'It is all notes,' he said, 'you are to pay them into the bank. The master knows you are honest, so he is not afraid to trust you. Pay them in as soon as you get to the town and have delivered the vases.'

Faello coloured with pleasure; it was the first kindly word or recognition of his honesty that Ser Baldassare had ever given him, and the potter

was Dea's father. With a lighter heart than he had known for days and months, Faello cracked his whip in the air and started off beside his mule; Pastore running foremost, as his habit was, a big, snowy, curly form bounding about in the soft light of the daybreak.

Faello felt almost happy. It seemed almost like being nearer Dea, to think that her father would trust him with the money that all Impruneta was aware the potter loved better, as some said, than his very soul itself, and very much better than his daughter.

The sun beamed out in all its glory, and the golden light of it spread itself over all the vastness of Val d'Arno; the chimes of the Certasa rung for the first mass; Faello fell on his knees in the dust by a wayside cross, said a prayer, and rose almost happy.

Pastore, pausing as he prayed, leaped on him when he rose. Faello kissed him.

'It is nothing to be honest,' said Faello to his dog; 'but oh, dear Pastore, it seems such a great thing when people are so good as to praise you because you are.'

Pastore trotted onward, waving the white plume of his tail, perhaps thinking that dogs are

always honest, but do not get very much credit or comfort for it from those they serve.

As the day was fully up, they reached the town—empty, silent, full of long shadows, with the fragrance as of a garden in it everywhere, from the bundles of carnations, and roses, and wallflowers placed at all the street corners, waiting for the buyers that would come out a little later.

Faello and Pastore stopped a moment to drink a draught of water at the big bronze trough at the end of the Canto di Borgo San Jaccopo, and then took their cart-load across the city to the place of its destination. By the time the vases were all unloaded it was eleven o'clock; both dog and youth felt sore pangs of hunger.

'We will pay the money into the bank, and then eat, Pastore,' said Faello, and went leisurely with his emptied cart back again through the town to the place of business which he had been bidden to seek. He left Pastore on guard as usual at the head of the mule, and entered the glass doors of the bank.

They made him wait some time up on a second floor, shut up in a close little room; they were busy, for it was a market day, and they kept him nigh three-quarters of an hour whilst they

wrote out the receipt of the notes he had brought. Faello felt the time very long, it was suffocatingly hot in this room, hotter than in the streets, and he was very hungry, and felt sorry for poor Pastore sitting down on the scorching stones with an empty stomach in the blazing sun. Still he was not uneasy, the cart and mule were safe, for none would touch them with the dog there on guard.

When at last they told him he might go, and gave him his receipt for Ser Baldassare, it was full noon, and an August noon in the streets is good neither for man nor beast.

He hurried lightly down the stairs, and ran out, joyous to be free; but at the threshold he stopped stupidly, and stared up the street and down. Pastore was not there, neither was the mule in the cart.

He thought he must be dreaming; that the hot air had made him blind and dizzy. Then he put his hand to his mouth, and shouted the dog's name again and again and again.

A shoeblack, who was dozing near in a little niche, under some shade, was wakened by the noise, and came and shook him by the arm.

'Do not yell like that, boy; they will take

you up, too. They lassoed your dog half an hour ago.'

'What!' said Faello, with a shriek that seemed to him to wrench his very life out with it. The shoeblack nodded.

'They lassoed him. You know the law—no dogs loose in the streets. They came up behind him and—phew! the thing was round his neck, and he throttled and on his back, before you could whistle. They do it always, you know. Don't look like that! He was alive when they hauled him in the barrow.'

'And the cart—the mule?' stammered Faello.

'Oh, somebody walked off with them, once the dog was gone. I saw it all, but it was no business of mine. Why, how you look!'

The voice of Faello rang down the emptiness of the street in a pitiless scream.

'Pastore, Pastore! my dog, my friend, my brother! Oh, the fiends!'

'Quiet,' said the shoeblack; 'if you call names they will arrest you. They took my boy up the other day for wrestling a bit to save his dog. Don't make a noise, but run—they won't have killed him yet, most likely; though he was half strangled as it was, poor brute. Run!'

The man told him where to go, and Faello ran with bare trembling feet on the burning stones. The loss of his mule and his cart he had forgotten. He tore through the city like a madman.

It was the intense dry pitiless heat of the August midday, which drives all creatures within doors, and the whole town was as quiet as a graveyard, and all the shutters were closed as for a death. The rays beat on his bare neck, and the pavement blistered his bare feet, but he took no heed. He only thought of his lost friend.

When at length he came to the place which the shoeblack had bidden him seek, he looked like a mad dog himself; his eyes were bloodshot, his tongue clove to his mouth, his lips were covered with thin white foam. He beat on the doors with both hands.

'My dog, my dog! I am come for my dog!'

The doors opened slowly; an official, angry and stern, looked out and asked how he dared invade their rest like that. A bare-footed boy, dusty and ragged, is never a creature that commends itself to the Law.

'You stole my dog—you strangled him!' cried Faello, fairly beside himself. 'They say

he is here. I will see him, or I will kill you, every one! Let me in—let me in—I am come for my dog!'

'Get out, fool, or I will give you to the guards,' said the jack-in-office, and kicked his foot off the sill and shut the doors again. Faello beat on them with all his might.

'Thieves! assassins! stranglers! Let me in—let me in! What right have you to touch my dog? He was doing his duty—he was guarding my cart. You murder him, and the cart is stolen. Listen, listen, listen! I love him better than myself. He hungers with me, and plays with me, and we are brothers. How dare you touch him? You lassoed him! Oh, dear God! to think of it! Oh, my dog—my dog! Listen—I will do any work you like for you if you will just let me see my dog. You shall put me in prison if you will only let me take his place, and will send him home to the children. Will you—will you? Do you hear?'

But his cries were only echoed dully back by the closed door and the dead wall, emblems of the human cowardice and the human injustice that make a hell of earth for earth's dumb creatures.

He beat at the wood and the stone, and wept

to it, and prayed to it, and cursed it, and then stood dumb and stupid, the sun beating down on his head.

'What shall I do?' he muttered. 'Oh, dear San Rocco, you love dogs—help Pastore, help him! help him, help him!'

Then all grew dark, and he fell down, and the vertical rays beating on him seemed to dart like fire through his brain.

When he woke again to the light of day, he had been drawn into the shade of an archway, and the shoeblack was bending over him.

'I thought I would follow you, I am glad I did,' said the shoeblack. 'Are you better? It was the sun. Cover your neck at the back; you look stupid.'

'The dog,' muttered Faello between his dry lips, and staggered up on to his feet.

'You should have come and asked humbly, they would have let you in then; what is the use of calling them names? They are too strong for us. They are the right side of the door, and we are the wrong. Only that it is noon, and not a guard about, they would have put you in prison for all those words. Oh! yes, a black-

smith that I know, he is in for three weeks because he helped a fine black dog to slip out of the lasso. He had never set eyes on the beast before, but he felt sorry. Oh! yes, these are fine times; this is the freedom, you know, we old fellows fought for; Lord, the fools we were to fire a shot! Every bullet then brings us a tax now! Fine times! Wait you a bit here—keep in the shade—you look blind still, boy. I know your dog; I will go see if he be alive.'

Faello leaned his back against the archway, and waited; his brain seemed all on fire, and spinning like a woman's wheel. If he had been shown then the men who had taken his dog, he would have leapt on them and killed them. Petty laws breed great crimes. Few rulers, big or little, remember that.

After moments, that seemed to him years, the shoeblack returned.

'He is alive,' he said quickly; 'but he looks bad, and they have muzzled him. They think him dangerous. They will kill him at night if he be not brought back—poor brute!'

Faello moaned aloud.

'They want five-and-twenty francs for con-

travention, and five-and-twenty more because he bit them before the rope was quite tight. You will not get him back for less.'

'And I have not fifty centimes upon earth!'

Faello's head fell on his chest, and he sobbed bitterly. The shoeblack shrugged his shoulders, and stood silent.

'It is freedom,' he said at last; 'it is what we fought for, we wiseacres.'

Faello did not hear him. Every muscle and nerve of his body were quivering.

His dog would die for want of fifty francs!

'Cannot you get the money, since you take it so to heart?' said the shoeblack. Then he lowered his voice and added, 'They want to kill him—that is it—you see he is a fine dog. A surgeon has had his eye on him some time; the surgeon means to get him and cut him up alive, or burn him to death, after gouging out his eyes. They think to find God in that way, those gentlemen.'

Faello gave one shrill weak cry, like a wounded hare's; then, fleet as the hare, he wrenched himself out of the man's grasp, and tore once more across the wide white waste of the sun-parched streets and squares.

The strength of lions seemed to have flowed back into his veins.

'The devils! oh, the devils!' he moaned, as he flew.

He had no clear-shaped thought of what to do, but he said to himself that he would have that fifty francs that day if he seized the silver off a church altar, or dashed his hand through a goldsmith's window. He would try all honest ways first, but if they failed he would go to the galleys himself sooner than let Pastore go to the torture.

Suddenly a hope flashed across him—Would Ser Baldassare lend it?

He had not touched bit or drop since the previous night; his clothes were wet with sweat as with water; he saw the blinding dust of the road through dizzy eyes; the nerves of his temples were beating like sledge hammers, but he held on straight along the road, which he knew so well that he could have traversed it blindfold, with that strength of desperation which sustains the panting stag and the jaded fox, as they race before the hunters.

How he returned to the village he never could tell; he ran and walked, ran and walked, alter-

nately, as a sleep-walker might in a dream. But go as fast as he would it was four by the clock when he reached Impruneta, and staggered into the yard of the master potter.

'Could he see Ser Baldassare?'

He had never in all his life asked such a thing before.

'He has lost the money,' thought the foreman, and ran and called Ser Baldassare, as he never would have done for any lesser woe.

'You scoundrel! you have lost the money! To the Pretura you shall go!' cried the potter, rushing out with face of purple. Faello put his hand in his belt, and pulled out the banker's receipt. The potter snatched at it suspiciously, read, and, satisfied, grumbled angrily. Why had he been frightened all for nothing?

Faello, with a few gasped words, told his tale, the great tears rolling down his cheeks and stifling his voice, and ended with a piteous prayer to be lent the fifty francs.

'Oh, dear master,' he moaned, as he sank on his knees in the dust, if it were anything for myself I would not dare to pray for it; but it is for Pastore—the innocent soul; the dear, tender, honest, loyal thing that loves me as my sisters

never can. Oh, dear master, Pastore is nine years old. All these years he has guarded your vases in the town, summer and winter, waiting for me, and will you let him be tortured to death when you can save him? Oh, master, master, I will work every night, every feast-day, every holy-day, till I have made the money up to you. The saints will not be angry. They will know very well why I do it. Oh, hear me, pray—lend me the money, and I will slave for you, do the mule's work as well as my own—anything, anything, anything! They will torture him to-night if you do not.'

He paused suddenly, his great eyes, swimming and agonised, fastened on the face of his employer; hanging breathless on the answer of the mute lips as for his own sentence of life or death.

Ser Baldassare pursed his mouth and was silent; then he smiled a little.

'There are plenty of dogs: you can get another. No; I cannot give a lad like you such a sum.'

Faello, without a word, rose to his feet, staggered a little, and went out of the yard.

'A likely story,' said the foreman, with a sneer. 'The boy has been drinking in Florence.'

Faello, staggering still, went out of the gates into the road. The heat had lessened somewhat with the passing of noon, but hot sickly vapours were in the air; the cloudless sky was of a pallid unnatural hue; not a leaf moved or a bird sung on the parched trees; there was only the noisy monotonous hum of the tree-crickets that never ceased, and was like the din of machine-wheels.

Faello stood still, and looked up with his smarting blood-shot eyes at the pale heavens. He was a pious, tender, God-fearing lad, but as he stood there he doubted God. He might have done some desperate thing, for the law, perhaps, makes more criminals than it cures; but at that moment a hand touched his, and starting and looking down, he saw Dea.

'I have only five francs; but pray take them,' she murmured, as she slid the money towards his fingers. 'Tell me, could you not sell that plate they call a Marriage Plate?'

Faello drew a shuddering sigh. So deep was his musing, so utterly was his heart with his imprisoned and martyred dumb friend, that the presence and touch even of Dea could produce no emotion in him. He was in the desolate abstraction of an overwhelming grief.

'The Marriage Plate!' he echoed. 'But I promised never to move it—I promised.'

'But she said—"unless God were to wish it." Your sisters told me so. God would wish it now,' murmured the girl; then hearing a step, fled away back to her father's house.

Faello stood alone, her little five-franc note curled in the palm of his hand.

God would wish it now.

He muttered the words to himself again and again. Oh, if he could but be sure! He tried to think, and see whether this were but a temptation assailing him, or whether the voice of Dea had been as the voice of an angel.

He prayed in dumb inarticulate fashion, as Pastore himself might have prayed, to have light shed on him to see his path aright. He dropped down a moment on a wayside stone, and covered his face and tried to think.

Yes, surely God would wish it. Surely God would desire him to save the life of an honest innocent living creature from the most hellish torments of man, rather than desire him to keep the mere empty form of a soulless promise? Surely the dead would wish it too?

She saw him now—that Faello believed as he

believed that the sun shone upon him. She would not be angered; she would not think it disobedience. She had said, 'unless God were to wish it.' And God must wish it now; God, who had made Pastore, and must have some little love for him—some little heed.

Faello rose to his feet.

His face was as white as the dust beneath him, but his resolve was taken.

'I shall do right; God must wish it,' he said in his heart, and felt in a dull vague way that if God did not, His service had little worth in it and little truth.

Then he went straight to his home, seized the Marriage Plate from the place where it had hung for a century, and carried it with him into the open air. At any other time a terrible fear would have prevented him from touching that sacred thing; but now all his mind and heart and soul were with his doomed friend. He had room for no other remembrance.

Yet as he passed the threshold he uncovered his head and crossed himself. '*Nonna mia*, you are not angry nor God either? The saints send me that I be in time!'

How he reached Florence he never knew.

Showing the plate to a man who had a fleet horse, he was taken in by the man and the horse to the town as fast as the wind would have blown, but he had no consciousness of what he did or how he went.

He made his way straight to the dealer, and laid the Marriage Plate down before him.

'Here it is,' he muttered; 'give me your hundred francs.'

A person standing near stretched his hand out and took the plate before the dealer could.

'I will have it, but it is worth much more, surely. Wait awhile——

'Not a moment; the hundred francs!'

'Is the boy honest?' murmured the person who all the while held the plate.

'Quite. The plate is his own.'

The other drew out a hundred francs in gold, and looked curiously at Faello. Faello snatched them, and flew as a swallow flies, straight through the town to the dog-prison.

Again he beat on the doors and shouted aloud, but this time the doors unclosed and let him enter, for this time he cried, 'Let me in: I bring the money!'

It is the open sesame of the world.

In another moment, weeping and laughing, he held Pastore against his breast, and bathed with his happy tears the dog's wounds.

Faello was carried home by the shoeblack insensible, and Pastore lay on the straw of the cart at his feet and on the pallet of his bed that night.

It was many weeks before the lad was well again; the sun had struck him.

When he could rise at last the great heat had passed; the earth was moist and green, the woods rejoiced, and the vines were heavy with purpling grapes. He stood at his door and held the dog's head against him, and thought how lovely life was.

'We shall have to work very hard, Pastore,' he murmured. 'The cart is stolen; there is the stolen mule, too, to pay for; the medicines will have cost a great deal, and the children must owe to the baker. Never mind; we are together. I am young, and it will soon be all right again. Oh, my dog, my dear dog!'

And then, with a sudden blush, he thought of Dea. Dea, whose little five-franc note he had unconsciously kept clasped in his hand all the while, so that it had come home with him, and,

throughout his illness, could not any way be loosened out of his grasp.

At that moment there approached him the stranger who had bought his Marriage Plate. The stranger greeted him with courtesy and gentleness, and brought the Urbino Plate back with him.

'You sold this for a necessity?'

'Yes.'

'Have you any idea of its value?'

'I thought it of none.'

The stranger smiled, and turning the back of the plate, showed him four letters placed thus:

V

O F

F

and a date, 1538.

'It is the work of Orazio Fontane, of Castel Durante,' he said. 'The name tells you nothing. Well, he was a great man; the greatest of all the pottery painters of Urbino in a long past time. The plate is worth fifteen hundred francs. I am not a dealer. I bring you the sum that is just. For the rest, I have heard your story. I am a foreigner; but I am much attached to your country, and I have estates close by here. I will

find you a good post; you will live on my lands, and Pastore shall have no need to risk his life in the city.'

Faello listened stupefied.

Misfortune he could understand; but this!——

When the truth, in all its ecstasy, broke at last upon him, his face shone like the light of the morning.

'God *did* wish it!' he cried aloud.

Two years later he married Dea, and Pastore headed the wedding procession.

UMILTÀ.

On the summit of the low chain of hills that lies between the Val d'Arno and the Val di Pisa there is a place that is called the Pian' di Cerri; and beneath the Pian' di Cerri is a village, called Mosciano, with a wonderful virgin, famous for her cure of maladies; and the village gives its name to these hills that rise above it, and that overtop one another in a succession of knolls, and bluffs, and pine-covered summits, with little valleys lying between them, and far away and below the gleaming west, with the silver sheen that shows where the sea is beyond the peaks of Carrara.

No one from the great world ever comes up here. Travellers know nothing about it, and

would care nothing; artists who would care have never heard of it; the broad sandy road that climbs up between the chestnut thickets, or passes through the pine woods, only serves for the mule of the wood-cutter and the oxen of the stone-cutter. In the fiercest summer heats these hills are always green and cool. Underground waters feed the trees and make a rich mountain flora bloom. There are hundreds of the beautiful Italian pines, and an undergrowth of oak-scrub, of purple heather, of golden gorse. It is full of balmy smells; there is hardly ever a sound except the sound of the axe or the pick-axe; which, alas! are never still there, for Italians are bent on the ruin of all such woodland as they have left.[1] The little valleys look like birds'-nests dropped underneath green leaves. When the sun sets behind the purple shadows of Monte Albano the Ave Maria rings everywhere; down below in the plains, and from the church towers up above, and on all these knolls and spurs that are the outskirts of the Apennines.

People live here all their lives and pay no heed to the mad world and its masters; know

[1] Since this was written these woods have been almost entirely destroyed.

nothing of wars that rage or crowns that change; count time by their harvests; and pursue the simple routine of their years in peace, troubled only by the beetle and the fly and the grist-tax. In turn no one knows anything about them; and the great world believes in its conventional Italy, with ruins, brigands, and a saffron sky, and is wholly ignorant of these fresh forest nooks; of this homely pastoral life, of these solitudes, where the hill-hare scuds and the blue thrush sings, and the white owl hunts the painted moth, and the water wagtail splashes in the brooks, that are so thick with violets in springtime that the very grass looks purple.

'Ah! you like those poor little weeds?' say the women, with a pleasant, pitying smile, and set to and gather them for you as they would humour a sick child in its folly.

Umiltà gathered them for me one day, and so I came in time to know her story.

Umiltà was as beautiful a woman as any could wish to see; tall and slender and straight, with perfect features and that 'red Venetian gold' in her hair which is not uncommon in Tuscany, and a walk which, like the poise of her head and the carriage of her graceful form,

was proud, and free, and majestic. Standing on the brow of this hill of hers, with one of the tall pines spreading its dusky branches above her and all the sunset colour about her, Umiltà was like a Titian picture. It was a feast day; she had her pearls about her throat; two pins with coral beads ran through the shining masses of her hair; a kerchief of soft yellow spun silk was crossed over her splendid breast, and threw up by contrast the sun-touched peach-like colour of her skin; she had a knot of yellow honeysuckle near her throat; a child, like a little St. John, rolled and tumbled at her feet, his hands full of cherries and his curls full of sunbeams.

'Eh, eh!' said a brown woman beside me. 'Eh, eh, that is Umiltà! And to think she was a foundling and has been in prison!'

'Will you never forget that?' said a man, roughly giving the brown one a shake. 'Women can never let bygones be bygones,' he grumbled to me. 'Not that it matters, you understand—every one knows.'

The big bell of Mosciano clanged in its open belfry tower down in the hollow where the village is; the beautiful woman with her yellow honeysuckle (mother of the woods we call it here)

went down through the pines to mass; the child tumbled after her, rolling as puppies do, dropping his cherries one by one; she lifted him up and carried him, and he hung a bunch of his cherries on one of the pins in her hair. The laughter of the baby echoed merrily through the sunshine; they were soon both lost to sight through the tall lilac plumes of the heather.

'She is the handsomest woman in these parts,' said the woodsman to me; 'and that is why the women never will forget that she has been in prison. Story? Oh, I am no hand at a story. The priest will tell you better than I.'

But it was not from the priest, but from Umiltà herself, and from one who loved her, that I came to know her story, where she lived under the pines. One summer dawn, down in Florence, on the steps of the little Bigallo, a new-born child was found by one of the city guards. It went to the Innocenti, no one claiming it and no trace of its parentage being found anywhere. At the Innocenti it was brought up with many another unowned little mortal, and was called after the good Saint Humility, as a name very well befitting to a foundling. No one wanting, and no hearts being centred in her, Umiltà throve

apace, and grew up as lovely a child as those old walls ever enclosed; very strong, too, and full of health and vigour; affectionate also, and intelligent, but rebellious, and very often in disgrace. At fourteen she was almost a woman, and being deemed old enough to gain her own living, was put out as a servant on the hills with the priest of Mosciano.

Umiltà, who had never been out of the Innocenti or the streets that surround it, in her solemn little walks, winked her great eyes like a dazzled owl, as she was taken up the broad, steep road between the wheat, and vines, and olives, and set down in the lustre of the strong sunset light, with the valleys, and the mountains, and the clouds around her.

'Is it heaven?' she said, under her breath, startled and afraid for so bold a child.

The people laughed: there was no one to tell her that the unpolluted country is the only likeness of heaven that men and women have, would they but understand its blessing and divinity. She had thought a great deal about Paradise, kneeling on the stones in the dusky chapel, and hearing the droning tones of the preachers, like the burring of big bees about her

head, but she had always been told that it was hopeless for her to think of ever going there, because she was so very naughty.

When she went to sleep that night on a little truckle bed in the pigeon-house, though all the place was smelling foul with silkworms, as it was in the month of May, Umiltà was still certain it was heaven. In the whole of the fair skies the stars were shining, and in almost every knot of heather sang a nightingale. She who had always closed her eyes on white-washed walls, and never heard any evensong but a paternoster, felt quite sure that the saints had taken her, naughty though she was.

From that moment Umiltà loved the pine hills of Mosciano. She had never before loved anything except a small forbidden mouse, which was taken from her and drowned in a pail of water, at which she had screamed and sobbed, and flown at the nun in authority over her like a little furious dog, with tooth and nail, in blind mad rage, and had been held *in contumaciam* afterwards for three long months and more, in vain effort to drive the evil spirit out of her.

She had not been above a year or so with the priest's household when he died, and the

family was dispersed. A farmer's wife who lived on the hills and knew the girl (and knew her cleanliness, her strength, and her clever ways with beasts and poultry, which seemed to come to her by nature) offered her a home in return for her services. Umiltà accepted gladly; all she cared for was not to leave the hills; and in the home of stout Signora Rosa she dwelt and grew up into womanhood.

Donna Rosa was an excellent woman, industrious as a bee, pious in a homely, old-fashioned way, and very honest—as times go. She was kind-hearted, too, and hospitable, and had brought up her sons and daughters well, and was both loved and feared by them. She was a good woman, but she was a masterful one. Her husband never dreamed of having a will of his own, and sold his heifers, and threshed his corn, and went out to work with his long-handled spade like a mere labourer, just as ever she pleased to tell him to do, and never by any chance dared to grumble if the soup were thin and the polenta cold. With a mistress of this sort the stubborn will of Umiltà was necessarily very often in collision, and never bent or broke without a sorry struggle.

Umiltà was a girl good for little; so everybody agreed. The voice of the majority is considered nowadays to be the voice of truth, so Umiltà was condemned by her neighbours.

A few liked her, but they did not dare, or care, to say it. To be in the minority requires moral courage or intellectual vanity; neither qualities were much known in the Pian' di Cerri.

That she was clever, and when she chose could do more in one hour than the rest of the maidens in six hours, nobody could refuse to admit. But then it was so very rarely that she did choose, that this merit was seldom perceivable. She could spin magnificently, she could plait, never even wanting to look down at her tress of straw; she knew all about herbs and simples; she could manage the cattle in a wonderful way, but then usually she would do nothing at all except look at her own handsome face or braid her thick burnished coils of hair. Umiltà was always weaving marvellous histories of herself, and had the misfortune of believing herself destined to much finer fortunes than those which were as yet her lot. In a word, she was proud and discontented.

These are not lovely or loveable qualities anywhere, though it may be an open question whether it is not they and nothing better that have produced the chief part of the world's heroisms and martyrdoms; and they are qualities that are thoroughly detested in a village community high up in the hills, where everybody is as good as anybody else, and visions of any other world than this little world of sowing and reaping, planting and felling, oil pressing and corn threshing, never by any chance are known.

Moreover, Umiltà was far too richly dowered by nature to be well looked on by her female companions; she was really beautiful, with a classic grace about her that made her 'move like a queen,' as those innocent souls said, who, never having seen any queens, kept their illusions. Umiltà, standing with bare feet among the yellow corn of the threshing floor, or amidst the lilac-flowering tall heather of the hills, was a royal creature in the fullest sense of those old majestic words.

She kept her person, too, with a sweet cleanliness, so rare there that in itself it was a mark of extraordinary pride; and when she had

a little money she spent it, indeed, on adornments of her personal beauty, but with an unerring excellence of taste that made her hold the gaudy coloured kerchiefs and the flowered stuffs of her neighbours in a profound disdain. Umiltà, too, would always have a knot of scarlet carnations, in summer, in her breast, or, when she could get nothing rarer, a cluster of the golden broom flower in winter, and this also made them very angry, because nobody likes flowers except foreigners and fools, and it was only to show how white her skin was—her skin that never browned with any weather. On the whole, it was natural that Umiltà should have no love in her community; certainly some of the young men, blinded and distraught by that beauty of hers, would have made love to her, but she was so haughty, so rough, so quick-tongued with them, that they retreated shamefaced, and went to other listeners more facile. 'As if I would marry one of them!' said Umiltà in her contemptuous soul; and she would drive the goats up among the pines, and look across at the mountains, and dream all kinds of vague, shapeless dreams, in al of which she wore a crown of gold, and saw throngs of people on their knees to her.

If she could only know who she was! If she could only know!

In the merry nights of the threshing or the maize picking, of the walnut shelling or the vintage, when other girls were laughing, chattering, or listening round-eyed to an old world tale, or chiming in with the songs some lover sang to a guitar, Umiltà sat aloof, dreaming—always of the golden crown, always of the people on their knees.

At such times she would as often as not take her portion of the work to be done with her, and go up into her loft, and open the wooden shutter, and shell her maize or her walnuts by the light of the moon, and look up at it every now and then, and away at the dark silent valley and the silvery mountains that touched the clouds; and when the love-lay of the guitar thrilled up to her from below she would only feel sullen, and sad and angry. She was impatient with her lot: life has no worse fever.

One night as she sat thus, having taken up peas to shell—for it was full summer, and the cart went into market at midnight, having many miles to go—she heard a loud, joyous uproar suddenly break in on the sounds of the singing

in the court below, and she heard the women all laughing and crying together, and the voice of the good Signora Rosa shrieking above them all—

'My son! My son! My son!'

'It is Virginio come home at last,' thought Umiltà, as she cracked her peas; she had not even the curiosity or the interest to look out of her little window. Virginio was only one of his family—nothing to her. She went on cracking her peas, and all the glad, excited tumult of welcome underneath her moved her no more than it moved the cows munching their bundles of grass and the fowls roosting on their rails. When her portion of peas was all done she threw the pods down by a space in the floor into the manger of the cows below, put her peas in a great measure, and sat gazing at the moon, which shone white and beautiful amidst light clouds above the edge of the pinewoods. Down in the valleys bells were ringing, because it was a saint's day on the morrow. In the woods there were the voices of nightingales.

Umiltà sat and dreamed.

An hour went by or more; then the shrill tones of Donna Rosa called to her.

'Umiltà, Umiltà! come down! Are you up in the loft again?'

Umiltà took up her measure of peas, and went down the wooden ladder silently. The door at the foot of the loft-ladder opened straight into the kitchen; it was ill-lighted by some wicks that floated in brass sconces of oil, but the lights dazzled her as she came out of the darkness of the hay-chamber. The big kitchen was quite full of a crowd of neighbours; there was a deafening din of speech and outcry; in the centre of it all, and the cause of all the uproar, was a tall man of seven and twenty, with a dark, pale, handsome face, half shaded by the heavy, drooping plumes of his hat; he wore the dress of the famous corps of Bersaglieri.

'Umiltà!' cried Donna Rosa, her voice choking with pride and delight. 'Come hither, come hither. We are like mad folks to-night. Here is my son, Virginio, come home at last. And a corporal; only think of that! A corporal!'

Umiltà looked sullenly under her long, silken lashes at the eldest son of the house, and with a cold stare from her lustrous eyes wished him a chill welcome. The Bersagliere swept the floor

with his plumes, and gave her a cordial and courteous greeting.

'What princess in disguise have you here, mother?' he murmured a little later.

Umiltà heard, and the sullen look died out of her beautiful brown, starry eyes.

This soldier had some sense.

Virginio Donaldi was a very handsome man; slender but strong; cool, daring, intelligent, and keenly valued by his officers. He had been seven years in the army, quartered all the time in perilous parts of Southern Italy, and had seen some hard mountain work and sharp brushes with brigands; he was also one of the first to enter Rome in 'Seventy. He had been wounded by a musket-shot and by a sabre, and knew what service meant. By nature he was grave and gentle, though in conduct very impetuous.

He had not seen his family for four years, and now had returned unexpectedly, having leave from his commanders for one month. Naturally he was the hero of his native hills and the chief jewel of his mother's treasures.

A Bersagliere up in the pine-woods, a man who had forced the City of the Holy One and yet come back alive; a man who had gone across

the sea to Sardinia and Sicily, and had been five hundred times in peril of his life!—never before had they had any such thing here at Mosciano. The news ran like wildfire, and three-parts of the village came racing up out of friendliness—remembering, too, that Signora Rosa's festa-suppers always were good.

It was late to prepare much of a supper that night, but Signora Rosa set her best wine flasks flowing, and there was good goats' cheese always ready, and a big cauldron of soup was there seething on the fire. All was joy, uproar, merriment, good-humour; the only one quiet amidst it was the Bersagliere himself.

As for Umiltà, she did her enforced share of getting things ready; then she slipped away unnoticed, as she thought, and went up the ladder to her loft again. She preferred the moon sailing above the deep quiet valleys to the uproarious mirth of the kitchen.

'A princess in disguise!' she repeated to herself, with a little smile. No words upon earth could have been more sweet to her.

She was not very sure what a princess was, but it was something that lived in a palace. She could read very well, and the pedlar who went

the round of the hills with a donkey and a cart, and woollen goods or linen goods according to the season, tapes and needles and pins, kerchiefs, beads, and pictures of the saints, had sometimes cheap paper romances, which she bought of him and perused up in her hayloft.

The soldier alone of them all looked round and missed her, for he had seen much that was beautiful in the way of women down in the south, but nothing so beautiful as this handmaiden of his mother's.

'Where is that golden-haired girl gone, mother?' he asked, as they sat round the supper board.

Signora Rosa stared round.

'Umiltà? Is she not here? Oh! just like her churlishness, plague take her. She is gone up to her loft, I dare say.'

'Does she sleep in the loft asked Virginio.

'Ay, why not? a good wholesome place.'

'But who is she? What is she? I never saw her before when I came home.'

'No. She came just after you left, my dear one; she was sent to the Rozzi folk then, from the Innocenti, and when they died I took her, out of good nature and for good luck.'

'A foundling is she?'

'Yes. A foundling, base-born no doubt. They picked her up on the steps of the Little Bigallo when she was a baby. She is as proud as Lucifer —the saints save us!—and is but a haughty, churlish creature. But one keeps her for good luck; and, besides, she has a wonderful way with the cattle and the poultry, that I must say. She likes the dumb things better than she does us.'

'Curious!' said Virginio, and drained his beaker of wine dreamily. It did not seem so very curious to him; he loved his mother well, but in his wanderings he had not forgotten that her tongue could be sharp and her hand not light; he could imagine that to a high-spirited maiden the service of Signora Rosa was not always a bed of roses.

'Do you think she would come down?' he asked at a hazard: he felt a desire to see that beautiful haughty head once more.

'Not she!' said his sisters; but, to humour him, they went to the foot of the loft-ladder and called. They got no answer. Umiltà was not asleep, and heard them well enough.

Netta Sarî, who was there, seemed angry.

She was a pretty girl, with a good figure, and a coil of red-brown hair and quick blue eyes, and she had always looked longingly for the return of Virginio Donaldi, though she had been but fifteen when he had last gone away; girls are women at fifteen, wherever the olive will grow with the vine; and the soldier had danced once too often with her for her peace in the gay nights of the vintage and maize shelling, and his sisters had always laughed and teased, and whispered to her —'When Virginio comes home ——!'

And now Virginio had come home, and was only thinking of the *trovatella.*

Netto, who had kept unwedded for his sake, also because she wanted something better than the peasants around, felt heavy-hearted and ill-used, as she fingered in silence her necklace of pearls—the very biggest and best pearls that any girl of her degree could boast on the whole country side.

Meanwhile, Umiltà went to her narrow little bed, and being kept awake by the noisy supper party below, dreamily watched the bats fly past her window, and pictured a crowned king coming to claim her in a chariot of gold. Why not?—she had read of such things.

At four o'clock Umiltà was awoke by the pigeons flying out into the air and the cattle lowing in their stalls underneath her. The dawn was spreading in rosy flush over the sky.

When with the first grey gleam of day she went down to her work with the cattle, even Signora Rosa was for once not up and scolding; but when she opened the door of the shed to let in the light she saw the tall, erect form of Virginio Donaldi standing before the threshold.

'Good morning, Signorina Umiltà,' said the soldier, and took off his cap to her, and took the cigar from his mouth.

The heart of Umiltà thrilled a little.

Nobody had ever called her signorina before. But she gave him a little uncivil nod and turned back to her cows and goats.

'Can I not help you?' said Virginio.

'I want no help,' said Umiltà, ungraciously. Virginio, indifferent to the repulse, began to clear the stalls out with a pitchfork.

Umiltà let him do it, but took no notice of him.

'Are you offended?' he asked once, as he paused.

'You must do as you like, you are the eldest

son,' she made answer to him, with a little shrug of her shoulders.

Virginio smiled and went on throwing in the clean heather.

'I have not forgotten the old ways,' he said, as he worked. 'I shall be glad when I come back to them for good.'

Umiltà gave him a glance under her curling lashes; she said nothing, but it seemed very odd to her that when one was a fine soldier, and could roam the world, one should wish to come back to be a peasant once more; but she knew that they all did so, or nearly all, and she was not inclined to talk to Virginio Donaldi when his mother and sisters were still in bed, and he seemed so very sure of his welcome.

She sat and milked her three cows in silence, turning her back upon him. That done, she measured the milk and poured it into the cans, and gave it to the boy whose business it was to take it down to the city, and who, yawning and muttering, had then appeared with his mule in its crazy ramshackle cart. Then she took her sickle, threw a skip over her shoulder, and went out to cut fodder for her charges; for it was broad summer-time; and the poor cattle here-

abouts are never allowed to leave their stalls in summer-time, lest they should crop the grown corn or munch the yet green grapes. Month after month of the teeming weather, when every inch of the land runs over with foliage and flowers, these poor dispossessed sovereigns of the soil stand on their four legs in their dark stalls, in gloom and heat, lowing their hearts out in piteous dreariness and captivity.

Umiltà did her best to soften their imprisonment to her own cattle by bringing them all she could rifle from the fields, and cutting the juiciest grasses and canes, the sweetest coils of bindweed and Madonna's bower. Virginio Donaldi watched her as she stepped out into the rosy glow of the risen day, the sickle in her hand, the basket over her shoulder. He was neither boor nor fool; though a soldier, he had a certain softness of temper and grace of thought. He would not follow her since she seemed not to wish it, but he felt that the sun as it came over the hills would find nothing lovelier than this silent maiden, whom a painter would have made into Ruth.

The warm roseate light was filling all the valley; the hills were still dark: Umiltà went

out of the light into the darkness, he lost her from sight; the cattle were lowing after her, which is their way of sighing.

'I will soon be back, my darlings; my poor little treasures, be quiet; I will soon be back,' she called to them, in wistful, tender tones, from the heights she was mounting.

'She has a heart in her breast,' thought Virginio. 'Who besides the cattle would reach it?'

Four or five times she came down from the hillside and emptied her pannier of fresh fodder into their racks, and returned to the fields and woods for more. She found the Bersagliere each time sitting outside the stable doors smoking. He moved his cap to her as she passed by him; that was all.

By this time all the family were astir, and Signora Rosa, in honour of his return, was beginning to brew a great brazen pot of coffee, a drink only for feast days and funerals, and other occasions of rejoicing. The sun was now above the edge of the horizon; the wonderful rose-radiance was already passing; the prose of daytime had succeeded to the poetry of daybreak. Life is very busy on a farm like Signora Rosa's,

and the day is full of occupation. The bullocks go out to the fields; the shepherds wander out with their flocks to find herbage; the sons and daughters all toil, the old granddames and grandsires also. The women work harder than the men; the soil is always wanting to be turned, and is heavy and sunbaked, and hard to deal with. At noon they gnaw a bit of black bread, at twilight they sit down to a cauldron of herb soup. That is their life. It is busy and laborious; it has little leisure; but if there be ever such a little bit the guitar is heard, the laughter also; they sing together, and the young ones dance, the old ones chatter. There is the beautiful sky over all, and the sweet-smelling air that is everywhere like the fresh heart of a rose. It is a life worth the living, despite all its privations.

Virginio Donaldi thought it the best life of all. The Tuscan always clings to the soil. He will go out into the world and be a good soldier, obedient, patient; but all the while, as he serves, his heart will be with the little village of the plain or the mountain that first gave him birth. Honours may come to him, praise and promotion may tempt him, and distinction await him if he will only remain away; but scarcely ever will he

consent to remain. He is at once the pride and the despair of his officers. As soon as it is permitted to him, he will throw down the sword and go back to the old wooden plough, lying in the furrows at home, where the golden tulips spring up with the corn. The old life is dearer to him than all gain and glory elsewhere; he will pine always when away from them for the low red-tiled roof, the little brown church with its tall tower, the hanging fields garlanded with vine-wreaths, the calm white oxen with their musing eyes—all that he has left behind him in the solitude of some lonely and fragrant hillside, where his mother sits and spins in the doorway, and the little brook runs past the house, blue with violets, or yellow with celandine, as the season goes. These are the things the soldier lad always hungers for: these are the things he sees when sleeping, as dying he has dreams of heaven.

Are there not many worse passions? *L'esprit du clocher* is derided now-a-days. But it may well be doubted whether the age that derides it will give the world anything one half as tender and true in its stead.

It is peace, because it is content; and it is a peace which has in it the germ of heroism;

menaced, it produces patriotism—the patriotism whose symbol is Tell.

Virginio Donaldi was a true son of the soil. His officers and commanders had done their very uttermost to induce him to make the army his career for life. When his enforced three years had expired he had consented to remain, and had received all such promotions and rewards as it was possible to confer on a man of his years; and there was, indeed, no rank in reason to which he might not ultimately hope to ascend. But he was tired of it all; he was always hungering and thirsting for his own pine woods, and he had fully resolved, when another three years' time should be ended, to throw down his sword and return and live on the old homestead that, by usage of the land, would pass to him when his father should be laid within the grave yard at Mosciano. To feel the heather against your knees, and the wind in your face, and the white oxen straining at the yoke, and your own arms free in your shirt-sleeves—he thought that better than all the gold on all the uniforms in the king's service.

Hero though he was in the eyes of his neighbours and his family, and decorated soldier though

he had become, he fell at once into the old ways of his home, and this morning he went out to the farm work with the rest, and would not let them say him nay. As a reward his farm work brought him in perpetual contact with Umiltà, and the fair, grave, scornful face of his mother's hand-maiden seemed to him to fill the world of sunlight with its own radiance.

Love is born at a glance here.

It was June, and the reaping had begun; the weather was brilliant; the tall wheat was brown as a berry. The green maple boughs, vine-wreathed, shaded the reapers, and where they were not, there was the silvery shade of the olives. The fields went up hill and down dale, precipitous and lovely, and little bright rivulets of waters sparkled through them.

Virginio did not think of Ruth, because he had never read about her, all those Scriptural stories being unknown where the Angelus bell is heard; but she would have made a most beautiful Ruth had any painter been by to see her amidst the tawny corn with the scarlet poppies, reaping hard with her rough sickle, and never casting a look to the soldier, who would have shared or softened her labours had he been allowed.

Umiltà worked well because she was young, was strong, was jealous of excelling in whatever she did; but all the while that she was working her brain was busy weaving dreams, thinking of the golden chariot that was sure to come; wondering what they would say when they should see her in her robes, with her crown on:—in the pedlars' books all the queens wore crowns, living or dying, and there were little woodcuts of them in their diadems.

She knew very well how she would look—herself. Toinetta Sari, who had come to help, as neighbours' girls and boys do on such occasions, looked at her and hated her more than ever before, as she saw the Bersagliere keep his sickle so close to hers and lie down so near her feet, when in the broad noonday they rested under the maple, and the flasks of wine went round. Not that Umiltà noticed him one whit more than she did the field-mouse running away from the reaping-hook or the crickets in the trees, and she took all his courtesies and admiration with a contemptuous negligence that tried the patience of Toinetta more even than it did his own.

'She was only the scum of the street!' thought Toinetta, bitterly, as Umiltà, resting in the pos-

ture of Guido's 'Reading Girl,' watched the green lizards run among the corn, and pushed her hand among the dark amber of her tresses, and let Virginio waste his eloquent grave glances unanswered, and even unseen.

In her heart Umiltà enjoyed her triumph.

Girls can be very cruel one to another, and Virginio's sisters and their companion, Toinetta, had, many a day, stung and wounded the proud, stubborn spirit of their mother's *trovatella*, with a malicious ingenuity that hurt her worse than Signora Rosa's roughest tempers. It was sweet to her to keep their hero-brother from them all, and see their useless vexation and their futile efforts to draw him to Netta, and she laughed in her soul as she saw how he followed her, and avoided all the wiles of Sari's daughter.

But on Virginio himself she never smiled; not once all day. It was the triumph pleased her: not the giver of it.

When night came, and they were all laughing and singing in the cortile, under the stars, she went up to her loft, and barred its door.

She could hear all they were saying. After a time the hubbub of voices ceased, and the songs were done for a time, and they called on Virginio

to tell them tales of his life in the south. At first he would not; he smoked in silence; he was taciturn and tired; then he spoke.

Umiltà did not know that, looking up, he had seen that the loft-window was open, and a stray moonbeam had shown him the shadow of her profile on the wall. But his voice reached her, coming up from the darkness, and she could not choose but listen: it was better than the pedlars' tales.

He told them all kinds of things that he had seen and done, warming to his natural vivacity of language as his memories awoke: he told them of the hunting of the brigands under the cork and oak forests of Sicily and Sardinia; of the fierce hand-to-hand combats in the fastnesses of the mountains; of the wild graces and fantastic customs of the islands, and their women; of the nights at sea; the sea that had never been seen by any one of them, and of a shipwreck he had suffered on it in a mad midsummer storm; of the coral-fishers' fleets, and the copper-miners' lives, and the palm groves, and the cactus-fruit, and the bivouacs on the strange, sweet-scented Mediterranean shores; last of all, he told them of the entry into Rome, when, at the trumpets of the Bersaglieri, the eternal gates unclosed.

Umiltà sat and listened, bending forward with her head on her hands.

His voice ascended to her from the gloom; she could not see him, only hear. The art of narration is common to his countrymen, and he possessed as well a melodious voice and an instinct of seizing the bold and the vivid points of a story. He held all his audience spellbound, hanging on the words of his lips, but the most breathless listener of all was the one he could not see.

The moon sailed on high; the stars shone; the nightingales sang; the night wore on apace; when his voice ceased, Umiltà woke as from a dream. It was midnight.

She shut her little wooden shutter hastily, and hoped that he had not noticed it was open.

Virginio had noticed it very well, and had seen a stray moonbeam shining on a head of Venetian auburn hair, and the glimpse of that moonray in the gloom had spurred him on in his recitals, and made him as eloquent as any troubadour of old. He had really seen a great deal of service for so young a man, and his natural intelligence, and a certain artistic perception in him, had made him conscious of what he saw, and able to place it, by a picturesque diction, before the eyes of others.

Uneducated Italians can usually recite well, only they have the defect of the uneducated—endless repetition; this defect the soldier had not: he escaped it by the natural simplicity of his narrations. All day long next day and every day Virginio hung about near his mother's handmaiden, and his mother might scowl and fret as she would; he was his own master, and he took his own road.

Love ripens as quickly as the pear on the wall under these suns. When Umiltà was in bed in the loft she would hear a mellow voice singing love lays to the mandoline, underneath in the dark, and she knew very well that it was Virginio singing them, and that his whole heart spoke. But they failed to touch her. He was only a soldier, and would be only a common husbandman; she waited for her chariot and her crown. She would shut the wooden shutter of the loft and shut out the song and the starlight together.

'I love you!' said Virginio to her on the seventh evening, being alone with her one moment in the cows' stable, amidst the green cut canes and the loose grass.

'I love you, and you are the soul of my soul!' he said to her, and he tried to take her hands

across the great fragrant pile of withering flowers. 'I love you, *Gesù m'aiuta!* Cannot you listen, and love me back again a little?'

Umiltà frowned darkly, then she laughed cruelly; she looked him in the face with a scornful unkindness, and without any change of colour or of glance.

'Go and say that to the girls in Turin. Maybe, they will care for such nonsense; I do not.'

'Nonsense! It is all my life, I say, that I offer. Listen. You are to me as the sun, as the stars, as the light, as the saints' glory;' and leaning across the wet canes and fading blossoms, he swore all the eloquence that a lover can on the double spur of passion and pain; then there was silence between them, broken only by the sound of the cows chewing the juice of the grasses. But plead as he would, Umiltà's face did not change; she grew a little paler, she looked a little colder still, that was all.

'I am only your mother's cowmaiden,' she said at last, with a curl of her proud mouth. 'But I am too proud for you for all that. Go. I hate you!'

'Hate me!' he echoed, in stupefaction, for what had he done to be hated?

But Umiltà did not even answer him. She plunged her fork into the fodder and gave her imprisoned darlings a triple measure for their suppers. The shrill voice of Donna Rosa called to her from the outhouse; she called loudly back; the moment was over, they were no longer alone.

As everyone entered the big kitchen for supper a few seconds later, in the twilight made by the dim oil-lamp, Virginio passed her and bent his head to her ear in a low, hurried whisper:

'That is your last word?'

Umiltà nodded, and looked cold, contemptuous, unruly, fierce, indifferent, all in one. In her heart she was very triumphant. He was Donna Rosa's son, and she could reject him as lightly as she threw a bare bramble out of her cows' provender!

She felt no pity for him; none at all.

In the morning she heard that Virginio had left in the middle of the night, walking down over the hill to meet the early train to Turin.

His mother was sobbing angrily; he had told her his colonel had summoned him suddenly. 'Just when I had killed that lamb for him!' said Donna Rosa, and in her rage she sent the lamb

down to the market, and gave her household only oil and beans.

Umiltà smiled; the mother saw the smile, and guessed all.

'You stiff-necked wench, how dare you!' thought Donna Rosa, furiously; it seemed almost a more unsupportable insolence in Umiltà to have rejected her son than it would have seemed to her an infamous audacity to have accepted him.

But she kept her silence, and Umiltà kept hers likewise.

'I am so glad—I am so glad—he is gone,' she said to herself a score of times a day; yet at night up in the loft she missed the sound of the mandoline, and the stars looked cold.

'I would say the same thing ten times over for ten years,' she told herself; and she began to wish feverishly that the gold chariot would come and the gold crown descend on her brow, and she was almost rough with her poor beasts, though after any roughness she would stroke and kiss them with a more melting tenderness than was usual with her nature.

It seemed as if something were lacking in her life, as if the low rounded hills were too close to her, and the pines and the olives were jailers.

She began to think that she would go away. She was not a slave. Donna Rosa could not keep her against her will. There were other places, there must be others, that the pedlars came from, and where the poor sold cattle went. She began to think that she would go and try her fortunes elsewhere—only she loved the hills. They had always been friends to her—the only friends she had except the cows and the dog Giorgio. Perhaps there were no hills anywhere else; she was not sure.

Others besides Signora Rosa became unkind to her. It was vaguely felt that she had rejected Virginio, and his sisters and all the maidens round hated her for it; they would have hated her even more if she had listened to him. Another girl would have gone in her loneliness to the priest, and taken comfort and counsel, but Umiltà did not do that. She was a pious maiden enough in her cold, silent manner, but she did not believe much in the priest, whom she saw gossiping, taking a pipe, being careful over new wine, and angry about his housekeeper's waste, just like any one else. So she shut her mouth, and grew colder, and curter, and lonelier, and handsomer every day, the men said.

Contrary to Tuscan usage, Umiltà always gave her poor stall-cooped beasts air and movement when she was allowed; that is, when the corn was reaped, and they might crop a little here and there without doing damage. After harvest she would always drive them out into the fields, and let them stretch their cramped, stiff limbs, and choose the juicy cane-leaves for themselves. Donna Rosa grumbled, and called it waste of time, but she did not seriously object, and Umiltà did it. After vintage the cattle might go where they liked; they could do no harm, and those fresh, bright autumnal mornings, when the clouds flew before the wind, and chased the heats away, were very precious to Umiltà, who was thus all alone in the open air, with nothing but olive boughs or the branches of the pines between her and heaven.

One day, as she was with her beasts thus, Netta Sari came by between the olives. Netta had a string of pearls in her hand. She stopped and showed them to Umiltà, to whom at any other time she had scarcely spoken. 'Look! They are new! What beauties! My great uncle of Pontassieve brought them last night. There are none finer in all the Commune—no, not even, I think, at Signa!'

Umiltà gave them a glance.

'They are pretty,' she said, and said no more.

'Pretty! Ouf! Is that all you can find to say?' cried Netta, in her wrath. 'They are no country pearls. He got them on the Jewellers' Bridge itself. *Via!*'

'What is it to me?' said Umiltà, sullenly.

'Oh! nothing to you, I dare say!' said Netta, with a scoff and a sneer. 'Nothing at all! You do not envy them, do you? You who were for ever making eyes at Virginio Donaldi for no use.'

The blood leapt into Umiltà's face and the fire to her eyes. She towered in her wrath above the little figure of the other maiden, and seemed alive and ablaze with a furnace of passion.

'I? I? Are you mad, Antoinetta Sari? I! Know you one thing, you, who sigh and pine for Virginio Donaldi, that he loved me--me—me; and I sent him away as I cast *that!*'

She hurled a fallen fir-cone over her shoulder on to the hill-side, where it fell from top to bottom, rolling into a ravine, and startling a goat that browsed there.

Netta turned very white. She could not doubt the truth of her rival's scathing, contemptuous words.

'You make me as base as you are!' said Umiltà with fierce scorn of herself as of the other; and she struck her cows with the branch she held, and drove them away up to where the pines grew. She knew that she had been ungenerous to the absent soldier, and had disclosed a sacred secret that it was not right of her to unveil, but a delicate honour was not a thing very much known upon those hills, and after all a saint would have said it, she thought, and she was no saint.

Netta Sari went home with her pearls that she had so gloried in, which now seemed to her no more than the eggs of a chaffinch.

Umiltà had her vengeance, but she herself was not much more content; as she wandered after her beasts through the pine glades where the cyclamen grew so thickly, she was dissatisfied with herself. After all, what wrong had Virginio done her that she should betray him and deride him?

It was just vintage-time; the yield of the grapes was good, and there were suppers everywhere, and dancing and singing, and thrumming of mandolines and merry-making and love-making all over the country, on the Pian' di Cerri as well as elsewhere, though they are not very rich up there.

Umiltà worked all day amidst the vines, but she shut herself in the loft when evening came on and the sport began.

Netta Sari danced everywhere, the pearls leaping up and down on her throbbing throat.

'That is how she loves Virginio,' thought Umiltà, with deep scorn; that was not how she herself would have loved him if she had loved him at all.

When the vintage was finished at Signora Rosa's, the stout-hearted, stern mother, though her heart was sore for her absent son, would not give any sign of sorrow; she prepared a grander supper than usual, and bade to it all comers from within four miles. It should never be guessed, she said in her soul, that her darling had been rejected by a foundling.

She ordered Umiltà to be present, and Umiltà obeyed; she looked very well with the scorn in her dark eyes, and the gleam of the lamps on her shining hair, but the men dared not go near her. 'As well try to tackle a wild cat of the woods,' they said; and she had her way, and was left to herself. When they were all at supper she got away by her loft and went to bed. There was not a man among them able to hold a candle to

Virginio, she thought—so tall, so pale, so handsome, so full of grace, like any count or cavalier! And she had cast him away like the pine-cone. She felt very proud and pleased; and yet the tears came into her eyes as she told her rosary before lying down on her rough bed, with the flutes and the guitars twanging and piping below, and the thump of the dancers' feet jarring the timbers of the loft.

Meanwhile, down below Netta Sari had lost her pearl necklace. With a scream she stopped in her dancing and cried aloud her loss. How had she lost it? when? and where? She did not know; putting her hand up to brush off a moth, she had missed it that moment. Everyone crowded round her; everyone searched on the floor, looked high and low, bore lights into all gloomy holes and corners; there was no necklace to be found, not even the trodden fragments on the ground. The music stopped; the dancing ceased; the tongues alone wagged furiously; but it was no avail, the necklace was gone. Netta could not tell when she had lost it, she had been so eagerly dancing ever since twilight. She was sobbing with dismay.

The beautiful necklace! the gift of her great

uncle from Pontassieve! What was a girl without her pearls? A bird without his plumes.

Netta wept salt tears, with her rosy little lips all pursed in grief and her azure eyes streaming. Donna Rosa, scandalised that such a loss should have taken place in her honest house, called aloud that the house should be searched—ay, top to bottom, nook and cranny—and seized a tall oil lamp, three-branched, and bore it off down passages and up stone stairs.

All followed her example, but there was nothing found.

'We have looked everywhere!' she cried, in despair.

'Except the loft,' said Netta, very low, and then bit her lip and seemed sorry for her words.

'Do you think the cows have eaten it?' said Signora Rosa. 'Come, then, we will look there, though it is stuff and nonsense.'

She went herself, with one of her daughters and Netta, up the ladder-like steps that led from the kitchen to the cow-stable. Umiltà, tired with a long day's work, and sleeping sound as only health and youth can sleep, never awoke; she had fallen asleep amidst all the noise of the dancing; she was asleep still as they entered,

her beautiful head on her arm, her limbs stretched out on the hay.

The shining of the light on her eyes aroused her. She awoke startled, blinded, and confused. 'What is it?' she murmured, thinking at once of her cows.

'Netta has lost her necklace. It is odd,' said Signora Rosa. 'Of course it cannot be here. But to satisfy her——'

The phrase was never ended, for as Umiltà raised herself on her bare, sun-burnt arm, and stared at them with suffused and startled eyes, a single little white bead rolled out of the hay that was under her, and shone in the light cast by the lamp. It was a pearl. Netta darted on it.

'It is one of mine!' she shouted.

Donna Rosa's face grew very stern, and ashen grey in hue.

'Get up, Umiltà,' she said roughly. Umiltà rose; her half-naked limbs shining in the light like the pearl.

Donna Rosa plunged her hands into the hay hither and thither rapidly, in silence. After a moment she drew out the necklace of Netta; the thread had broken, and the pearls were loose.

'Oh, you thief!' screamed Netta and the neighbours. Donna Rosa sat down upon the hay, with all colour blanched from her bronzed, hard face.

'It is impossible,' she muttered.

The cries of Netta had brought a dozen other guests up the ladder in tumbling haste. Umiltà shrank from the gaze of the insolent eyes, and strove to hide herself. She could understand nothing. She was half asleep still.

Donna Rosa thrust the door to fiercely with her foot. 'Get out, you staring fools,' she said savagely to her guests; then she turned to Umiltà more savagely yet. 'How came these in your bed?'

'These?' muttered Umiltà, stupidly. 'These, what? Why—how—I cannot understand!'

'I understand,' said Netta sharply, shaking the pearls before her. 'You stole them, that is what I understand. And I will have justice. Justice, Signora Rosa! It's a scandal on your honest house!'

'You shall have justice, never fear,' said Signora Rosa. 'And my house and its honour I can keep without a chit showing me the way. It is a mistake, I think. Umiltà, do you under-

stand? The pearls are in your bed. You stole them?'

Consciousness came at last to Umiltà with a rush of colour over all her face.

'I!' she cried aloud, and she laughed. 'I stole those pearls? Donna Rosa, are you and that girl both mad?'

'The pearls were in your bed; you sleeping on them!'

'I?' echoed Umiltà again, and then stupefaction overcame her. She stood like any young goddess with her arms crossed over her bare breasts, and stared upon them in the lamplight.

'Oh! the thief! the liar! the brazen thing!' cried Netta. 'Donna Rosa, you must give her to the guards. I have the right—two pearls are missing—father shall fetch the guards.'

'As you will, Netta,' said the mistress of the house, coldly, and too proud to ask that her house might be spared such shame. 'Umiltà, speak to me. You see the necklace is found in your bed. Say something. Are you innocent? I cannot think you guilty; and yet——'

Umiltà listened, with all her coldest scorn gathering in her flashing eyes and on her curled

lips. She did not understand; and yet she was hardened and reckless.

'You may think what you like!' she said, with a superb disdain, and spurned the pearl on the floor with her foot. Her great lustrous eyes seemed to smite Netta like two shining swords.

'I cannot tell what to think,' said Signora Rosa, who, for the first time in all her life, was trembling in every nerve of her robust body. 'I cannot tell; but it must never be said that I refused to deal justly by a guest in my own house. Right is right. Umiltà, get on some clothes. Netta Sari, call up your father and my husband here.'

Hours passed in consultation, agitation, altercation; the dawn was breaking. Umiltà only said, 'Think what you like,' with haughtiest disdain upon her resolute face. Netta would not abate an iota of her rights; her father, a feeble and passionate man, would not either; at sunrise he went down to the Lastra-a-Signa for the guards, and brought them up through the woods to take Umiltà.

Signora Rosa sat in her porch and wept bitterly. The man of law had never been seen to set foot across her threshold; the bitter disgrace

of it fell on her like the stripes of a whip; that her own serving maiden, a young creature that had eaten of her bread and slept under her roof five years, should go out dishonoured thus! and her heart hardened fiercely against the girl Antoinetta. 'She need not have brought this public shame,' she said to her daughters. 'She might have shut it up between ourselves. She might have left chastisement to me. She is a cruel girl and a harsh one. She has her necklace safe; for the two pearls missing I would have bought her new. She is a harsh girl and a cruel.'

Meanwhile Umiltà went to jail, taken between the guards, with their clanking sabres, down across the sweet leafy stillness of the vineyards and olive woods.

When they had questioned her (as they had no right to do, but did), she had only answered with contempt, 'I never touched her pearls; they can say what they like.'

And the guards privately made a note in their little books upon her as contumacious. It was, of course, contumacy.

The pearls had been found under her. Both the guards had often heard the 'Gazza Ladra,'

and hummed the music of it, like true sons of their soil, but the opera never occurred to them.

Her denial could only be contumacy.

According to the laws of the nation, the indictment against her was brought and the committal made out a few hours later.

The Lastra has the prettiest little police court in the world: a little clean-swept place, with green-shuttered, vine-hung windows, and the smell of the country about it, and little girls standing plaiting at its doorway. Its policeman looks like a gamekeeper, and its cheery Usciere like a forest ranger. In law he is a very terrible person, and delivers all kinds of unpleasant warrants and writs of summons or sentence; but rattling about in his little cart with his grey pony he is a most pleasant feature in the landscape, and they are also, indeed, the kindest people in the world: they are sympathetically sorry when they have to make an arrest, and do all their stern tasks with as tender spiriting as may be.

Nevertheless, the Inquisition appeared to no martyr more horrible than did the sunny Pretura in the hilly little street by the Pisa gate seem to the girl Umiltà, as she was led into it this brilliant summer morning. What would they do to her?

She did not know. She had read the illustrated historical romances of Guerazzi, in their cheap Milan editions, and believed still that people were tortured in prison. Her face was very white, but otherwise she gave no sign of the ghastly fears that filled her soul; her proud mouth was close shut, and her limbs did not tremble.

It was nine o'clock in the morning, and all the smiths, and coopers, and straw-plaiters, and seedsellers, and the like, that make up the little population of the Lastra, were coming out of their doors and crowding up to the place of justice in all the delightful confusion and excitement of hearing of a crime and gazing at the criminal. 'Diamine! what a beautiful wench!' cried the men. 'The impudent hussy!' cried the women.

Umiltà drew straighter her tall form, and looked with a fierce mute scorn over the curious pressing people, from whose eagerness, cruel or thoughtless, the guard had much ado to protect her. The steep stone-paved street with the brown gate at its summit seemed to heave up and down before her sight. But she found strength to move on without flinching.

They took her up the steps and into the little

red-bricked entrance place, which was already quite full of loosely-clad, chattering, inquisitive countrymen loitering about to hear the causes tried and the sentences given. In the inner chamber, which served as a court, sat the Pretore in his black robes and square black cap, like a Titian picture or a scene of Cinque Cento. The genial Usciere even looked transformed and terrible on his stool of office before his high desk. Behind the rail was the crowd: eager, merciless, bent on its own entertainment, emblem of the public, though only made up of a score or two of vinedressers, coppersmiths, butchers, bakers, and do-nothings.

Umiltà stood between the two guards more proudly erect than even when she had dismissed Virginio twelve months before. The grave, good face of the Pretore had a great compassion and interest on it; but she did not see that; she saw only a white sea of sunlight with a black blot upon it that she understood was her judge.

The interrogation began.

When, as usual, her parentage was asked, and some one answered for her '*gente ignota*,' the deep pride in her stirred with a cruel writhing

pain, like a creature under a blow. The accusation of the crime could not move her: it was untrue. But this was true: she felt a burning shame.

The cause was proceeded with, and lasted long. Things always last long in this country. The air grew drowsy and stifling, the sun beat at the closed blinds, the crowd shuffled about, changed, went in and out, the voices that were speaking boomed in her ear like the hooting and humming of gnats. When questioned herself all they could make her say was:

'It is a lie. I never took the pearls. I struck at her—yes, I struck at her. I would do it again. She is mean and she is false.'

So she said once, twice, thrice; and menace her as they might, she would say nothing more. The just soul of the good judge grew sad and perplexed. Facts were all against her utterly, yet he could not bring himself to believe in her guilt. He strove with unwearied patience and kindliness to make her speak out frankly, but she was too stupefied and too stubborn to perceive the kindliness of his drift; her soul was shut against him, as against all human things; she was only conscious of one thing—that they should

never see that they hurt her—no, not if it killed her to keep still and make no sign.

As for the crowd behind the rail, it was to a man against her. She was beautiful, true; but what title had she to stand and be mute and full of scorn like that, as if she were a queen? The crowd was angry, feeling itself slighted.

It was quite late in the sultry afternoon when, with a sigh, the good judge saw that on no reasonable pretext could he save her. Really and truly, defence there was none; she denied the charge, but that could go for nothing; it was only her own word.

Even her own mistress said nothing for her. Donna Rosa, stern and gloomy in her Sunday gown of wool and flowered kerchief, bore testimony only to her pride, her vanity, her scanty gratitude, and her intended slight.

With reluctance and regret the Pretore abandoned all hope of saving one who could not, or would not, save herself; from the chorus of loud screaming, eager, accusing voices one thing stood out fatally clear: that thing was her guilt. With pain he leaned forward on his desk, and in tones that were full of pity consigned her to prison to await her trial.

Umiltà, who for four mortal hours had stood erect as one of the young pines upon her hills in the golden west, fell straightway to the ground, as the tree falls when the axe cuts through it with the last blow.

Donna Rosa, hard woman though she was, broke down herself and sobbed aloud.

'Sooner would I have given her my own marriage-pearls!' she gasped above her sobs.

Netta turned very pale, and the cruel, hungry light of triumph began to fade out of her eyes.

The guards lifted up the inanimate form and bore it away.

For now it belonged to the State.

There is a brave old brown gateway among the three gates of the Lastra which faces the east, and is called the Porta Fiorentina. This is the gaol of the Lastra.

It is the highest and biggest of all the gates, with the weatherbeaten look of an old soldier about it, and its sculptured shields sorely battered, and with weeds and flowers growing between its machicolations. In it there are some chambers, with windows looking east and west, and these odd rooms are the village prison.

There they bore Umiltà, and there they

locked her in, with a pallet-bed and a bare floor; and the blue sky far off—so very far—gleaming between the bars as if in mockery of her. If you are not taken in the act in Italy you may go scot free for months, until your trial comes on, be you the blackest scoundrel that you may. Taken in the act, they do not let you go; Umiltà had been found with the pearls upon her, or rather under her. They kept her close until such time (probably in months to come) when it might suit the convenience of law to see whether she were innocent or guilty. Not that of her guilt any reasonable being could have any doubt. She had hidden the pearls in her bed, and, except on the supposition that she was mad and knew not what she did, no human being could clear her of the sin.

Signora Rosa, without confessing such a weakness to any one, for she was ashamed of it, drew out her purse secretly and paid what was needful for a prisoner to have a separate chamber from the rest of the imprisoned offenders, for there were four of these, and among them a woman of ill-fame, and it was not right, Donna Rosa said to herself, to excuse the waste of good money to her conscience, that any one out of her household

should keep company with light women, even in a prison cell. So Umiltà was lodged alone in a little room in the old gateway that had withstood the petards of the Spaniards and survived the countless conflicts of centuries; and there would await her trial and her sentence, which, according to the tedious snail's-pace of Italian law, would most likely not take place and be resolved on before Christmas.

'If she be sinless, set her free; if she be guilty, punish her quick and have done!' said Signora Rosa in her fury and her pain, and her shame at her decent and honest house being dragged into public ignominy thus.

But the usher shook his grey head: 'That is not the law's way.'

'Then the law is a fool and a beast,' said Signora Rosa, her brown cheeks burning.

The usher shrugged his shoulders.

He had been a servant of the law fifty years; it was not for him to find fault with his master.

Donna Rosa, shaken to her heart's core, stern and stout woman though she was, went homewards with the maiden. Toinetta Sari was very silent, as the cart jolted and jostled them together on the rough roads. Netta had been

wronged, and Donna Rosa had seen her righted; but she could not love Netta.

It was quite deep night when the cart reached the house. The girls ran out to hear the news, frightened and eager; the cows were lowing in their stalls for one who could not come to them; the dog smelt wistfully, then whined and wailed; it was a mournful home-coming.

Donna Rosa sat down on her wooden settle by the hearth, and flung her gown over her head and wept aloud once more.

'I never knew I loved the girl before!' she said to her daughters, with anger at herself.

Nettina, unnoticed, crept out of the door and went on to her father's cottage. She had had her vengeance, but it did not seem so very sweet to her now that it was fulfilled. The moon rose on high, the nightingales sang, the autumn night wore away, and Umiltà was in prison.

On the morrow Nettina asked her father to take her into the city. The good man stared. Maidens on the hills hardly dream more of going to the city than the pines think of uprooting themselves. If they are going to get married perhaps they go once, just to buy some-

thing, but otherwise never do they think of such a thing. 'Home biding makes safe finding,' is the Tuscan rule, and mothers and maids are deemed best by their own hearthstone.

But Nettina was the old man's pet and pride. She told him many pretty little lies of wants she had, and wishes, and in the end he took her down that very week, when market day came round, with the priest's housekeeper, Serafina, eighty years old, and deaf as a stone, to look after her.

Arrived in the city, Netta engaged the old woman who had come with her in the choice of flowered handkerchiefs at the open stalls by the Bronze Boar, and slipped away to a letter-writer in the market, six yards off the stall.

'Write this for me,' she whispered to the wrinkled scribbler behind his desk, and dictated to him: 'Your fine Umiltà has stolen some pearls, and is in prison. A well-wisher thinks you were in luck to be refused your suit.'

'Only that?' said the scrivener, disappointed; for he loved sesquipedalian phrases, and fine flourishes, and endless gyrations round the main point, without ever coming near it—being a man of fine legal talents, wasted.

'Only that,' said Toinetta, with the colour coming into her little nervous face and going up to the roots of her curling hair; 'and now put it in a good stout wrapper—I will pay you anything in reason—and send it, written very clear, to Signor Virginio Donaldi, under-officer in the army of the king, and of the regiment they call Bersagliere, at Torino. *Via!*'

The scrivener did as he was told, and Nettina dropped the letter in the post with her own hands. Now, at last, she did begin to taste her vengeance! It seemed nothing till she knew that he would know it.

'When will the letter get to that place they call Torino?' she asked feverishly at the post. When they told her 'to-morrow,' she could almost have screamed aloud with cruel joy.

To-morrow he would know it!

She ran, and danced, and skipped so foolishly upon the pavement that deaf old Serafina was scandalised, and pulled her by the sleeve, and muttered: 'That is not decent—not discreet, anyway. You should act as if you were in church, with all those fine shops round you.'

But Nettina hardly heeded her. She was so triumphant. On the morrow he would know

it! And neither he nor any one could ever trace the letter to her, unsigned, and written by the public letter-writer as it was, and the purblind eyes of the priest's housekeeper had never seen her either slip away to the Scrivano or slip the missive in the post. Netta had bought one of the neckerchiefs—a lovely thing with all the colours of the rainbow, and a peacock and a Chinaman depicted upon it amidst yellow roses—and had pressed it on the acceptance of Serafina, who was loud in her praises of the damsel and her conduct when they went to join the father before the Carmine Church and get into the ricketty diligence to go on their first stage to Vingone bridge at the foot of the hills, whence their own limbs would bear them the rest of the long homeward way.

Netta could not sleep all night for thinking of how clever she had been, and of how when the day should dawn Virginio should get the tidings of his love. It had seemed nothing until she had known that he would know it!

The letter came to Virginio Donaldi as he was cleaning his sword in his barrack-chamber. He had something more to do than to read letters; he thrust it in his pocket and went on with

his work, and marched and counter-marched his men, and did not look at his correspondence till, being free of duty at evening, he sat before a café and sipped a glass of lemon syrup in the dusty glare of the sunset.

When he glanced over the brief letter he sprang to his feet with an oath. Then he went straightway to his commanding officer and asked for leave of absence.

'You have been only back with your corps three months. Is your need urgent?' asked the commandant, who called him 'thou' and 'my son,' and was fond of him.

Virginio's face flushed darkly.

'So urgent that if the most excellent chief do not give it me I will take it, and risk being shot,' he answered rapidly, with a gleam like a flame in his eyes.

The commandant smiled. He was a man who called his soldiers his children, and who knew how to be indulgent as he knew how to be severe.

'As we are alone, I will let that speech pass. You can have three days' absence.'

Virginio went to the station; the night express was that moment starting southwards.

It was five o'clock in the early morning when it reached Florence. At seven o'clock a soldier, with the well-known green plumes drooping over his shoulder, was knocking on the door of the Pretura in Lastra-a-Signa.

A girl was sweeping out the little audience chamber, the birds were singing in the ivy outside the casements, the usher had just come in with a basket of pears and a bunch of sweet-scented olives. They stared at the soldier as if he were a ghost.

'As for seeing the master, it is impossible,' said the little maiden, sanding the floor.

'Impossible,' said the usher, smelling his *oliva fragrans*.

'I do not know the word "impossible,"' said Virginio, who was very pale. 'Go and tell him that I beg him, for God's grace, to give me audience, and that if he will not he shall taste my sword through his nightshirt.'

'Che! Che!' murmured the usher. 'Is that a nice way to talk in the halls of justice?'

'I am come for justice,' said Virginio, sternly. 'My sword has cut it out before now. Go!'

In the end he had his way; he saw the

Pretore, who was sitting down to his breakfast, and who was amused at the idea of the soldier running a sabre through his nightshirt, and touched by the agitation and resolve that were on the young man's features.

'You are sure the girl is innocent?' he said, at the close of their interview.

'I will stake my life upon it.'

'That is all very well. But you have no proof.'

'No. I have no proof. But I want none!'

'The law is not so easily contented, my friend. Permit me one question. This accused maiden is your betrothed?'

'No.'

'But she is your lover?'

'No.' Virginio hesitated a moment, then added quickly, 'I love her, but she will have nothing to say to me. She spurned me months ago.'

'So! You are very generous, then, and your word is worth the more. Would you like an interview with her? That I might perhaps grant you; with the bars between you, you might question her.'

'I will not question her,' said Virginio; 'but

I will tell her I believe in her, if you are good enough to grant me this great kindness.'

The Pretore nodded, and called through the open door to the usher.

'Stay a moment,' he said, when he had given his directions to the usher. 'Is there any cause why the accuser—I forget her name—should bear any ill-will towards the maiden accused?'

'Oh, yes!' said Virginio, roughly, with an Italian's frank indifference to all considerations of delicacy. 'The girl, Netta, is crazy for me. Her people, too, wanted me for her. And they all said I cared for nothing but the other one.'

The Pretore smiled again, and signed to the usher to take Virginio away with him.

Virginio was taken out down the hilly street, past the Madonna's shrine, and round to the Porta Fiorentina.

'You can only see her for ten minutes, and that with some one by,' said the usher.

'That is better than nought,' said the soldier, and they entered the door in the gateway, and went up the stairs.

The usher called to the custodian of the prisoners there, and gave the Pretore's order, and Virginio followed this new conductor to

a door that was heavily secured with bars and bolts. Virginio turned very white as he had never done in battle or in hospital, before the enemy's cannon or the surgeon's knife.

'She is in here; oh, the beasts!' he said in his teeth, and his hand went by instinct to his sword-belt.

'Some one to see you, by order of the Pretore,' said the jailer, thrusting the door open, without warning or question, and entering himself, Virginio lingering on the threshold.

Umiltà, who was lying half clad upon the bed, had barely time to throw her clothes about her and rise and face them.

She had been three nights in the place, and those nights had done the work of years upon her. All her beautiful healthful bloom had faded, her shining hair was dull, her eyes were wild; there was a haggard, haunted ferocity and a helpless misery in her face that went to the heart of the man that loved her. He reached her side in two steps.

'Umiltà, do you not know me? Look at me! I am your friend always, your lover when you will. I have come the moment that I heard of this accursed thing. Why do you not speak to

me? I do not ask you anything. I know it is all a lie.'

She looked at him incredulously; the fierce, dull misery in her was too deep for anything to reach it very quickly; she drew back like a wounded and savage animal.

'Go away,' she said in her teeth. 'Go to Netta Sari. She wants you, I do not. I am a thief, you know. They say so.'

Then she laughed a laugh that froze Virginio's blood, because once he had heard such a laugh in a madhouse in parching Palermo.

'They may say so,' he answered her, striving to keep his voice calm and steady. 'It is nothing to me that they say so. You are as guiltless as the child unborn, and I love you, Umiltà, and if I cannot free you, look—I will wait for you. Yes, I will wait for you; and the day that you leave prison you shall be my wife—if you will. That is what I came to tell you.'

He did not try to touch her; he stood erect and very pale; he pledged all his life, that was all. The jailer stepped noiselessly aside, and stood half-in-half out the open door. Virginio had forgotten him. Over Umiltà's face a great

light like the breaking of the sun through clouds shone for a moment, illumining its darkness. She was silent.

'Do you not understand?' said Virginio, with a sound like tears in his voice. 'You do not care for me; you spurned me, you hated me, you said; but all that does not matter. I love you; I will take you body and soul, just as you are, and the devil may strive for you as he will, he shall not get you. The great God has made you beautiful, and you have kept yourself pure—that I will swear. I cannot set you free: but I can wait. When you come out of this accursed place you shall come to me; and if in any after time any cast against you this vile lie from which you suffer in this hell, then they will reckon with *me*. And they will weep. That is all that I came to say.'

She heard him, and her haughty mouth trembled, and her whole form changed and seemed to grow alive with tremulous tenderness.

'You say this now?' she muttered very low, in a stupor of surprise.

'I say it now and always.'

Suddenly she sprang upward, and cast her arms around his throat and kissed him.

'Then you shall know the truth. I love you!'

One moment she held him in her embrace, another and she loosened and cast him from her.

'But I will never bring shame upon you, never, never! I will never bring you dishonour——'

Then her voice dropped, and she broke down into a pitiful passion of weeping; all her pride and reticence melted like the snow in a warm hand.

'I do not understand, I do not understand!' she cried. 'I never saw the pearls. How could they be in my bed? I said I did not know. I cannot say any more. I was asleep when they came up and found them; they were under me, yes; your mother herself took them out; but I know nothing, nothing!'

Virginio soothed her gently and kissed her dull, tumbled hair.

'You do not want to tell me that. Would I had been here. But you love me—answer me, you love me?'

Umiltà drew herself from his arms, and looked him softly in the eyes.

'Yes,' she said, with a grave sweetness that

changed her and made her lovelier in her pallor and her disarray than she had ever been. 'Yes; I love you. But I will never bring you shame, so help me, dear Mother of Christ.'

'You can never bring it me!' said Virginio. His head was whirling, his pulse was throbbing, his whole soul was rejoicing. He forgot that he was in a prison.

'You must come away,' said the jailer, looking back upon them from the door.

'One moment!' cried Virginio; and he took Umiltà once more in his arms and kissed her. 'She is my betrothed,' he said to the jailer.

'No,' said Umiltà, and she put him aside. 'No; not while they think me guilty.'

'That matters nothing, and it shall not last,' said her lover. 'Praise be to Heaven for this prison-house, my love, since in it you have shown your heart to me.'

Then perforce he left her, and, despite all his high hopes and his sure faith, his own heart sank as he heard the bolts clank and the keys turned, shutting the girl in from all the living world.

He went quickly out of the Lastra and up by-paths across the hills; then he hurried over the woods to his mother's house. It was still

early in the morning. They screamed when they saw him standing on the threshold, with the dog Giorgio leaping upon him.

'I have found the woman I love in prison,' he said, sternly, to his mother. 'Is it meet that one who will be your daughter should suffer there?'

Donna Rosa threw her apron over her head and sobbed. Should a thief ever lie in her son's bosom? Oh! the wretchedness of it and the shame!

'Whoever uses that word to her sees me no more in this life and the next,' said Virginio, white with passion, and not heeding his own choice of words. He did not tarry for bit or sup, but went on up the hill towards the quarry where Netta Sari lived. He did not know what to think. He did not know what to do. But in a blind, instinctive way he felt that the jealousy of the maiden he had slighted was the root of all this hateful and cruel mystery.

He strode without ceremony into the cottage of Sari, a big stone-built place, standing among the stumps of felled pines, and looking out towards the Cerbaia. As it chanced, Netta was sitting alone, plaiting at her twist of straw. She

too screamed when she saw the shadow of the sword upon the floor and the nodding of the plumes upon the sunlight. She trembled, and her lips turned grey and blue, as if with cold.

'You wrote me that?' said Virginio, thrusting the letter he had received at Turin before her face.

'I? Never!' said Netta with a ready lie, and endeavouring to laugh. 'Why should I write to you, Virginio Donaldi, if I could write? and I cannot, that you know very well.'

'You got it written. It is the same thing,' said the soldier, swiftly following up the success of his stray, chance shot. 'Netta Sari, you are a vile girl; you put the pearls under Umiltà's bed to make her ruin.'

He spoke on the mere random chance of his fancy, but he saw in one instant that he had guessed aright. The girl stared blankly at him, quivering all over as if with winter cold, then she began to sob and moan hysterically.

'Confess!' said Virginio, seizing her wrists with no gentle grip. At her cries, her father, who was cutting wood in the clearing, ran in frightened. Virginio with a gesture silenced him. 'Your daughter is a vile bearer of false

witness,' he said, keeping his grasp on the maiden's wrists. 'If you are a wise man come down with me quietly into the Lastra and make your girl come with you, or as sure as the figure of Christ hangs on your cross I will wring her tongue out of her throat and nail it on your own house door.'

Before noonday, down in the Lastra, the gossips had another tale to tell.

The confession of Netta Sari was taken down in form before the usher, the clerk, and the judge, and she had to put her cross upon it and swear to it. She had slipped upstairs whilst the dance was at its height and slid the pearls into Umiltà's bed of hay. She said she had begun the thing only in jest, and when she had found how far it went, had been too frightened to tell the truth. No one believed a word of this latter statement; it had been very well known that she had been always jealous of the woman that Virginio loved.

Umiltà was formally set free, and brought into the full sunlight of the court; she was very pale, and had such a light upon her face that the listening people gathered there said it was like one of the angels.

The judge asked of her if she wished her false accuser arrested and punished, and she answered in a low, faint voice, like the voice of one who has long been ill, 'No. Let her go. It does not matter now. And I provoked her.'

'You provoked her. How?'

'I told her that he loved me.'

The judge smiled.

She left the little audience chamber with Virginio and his mother.

She was very pale still, very grave, chastened and subdued.

'I think I shall never be proud any more,' she said, under her breath, and then looked in her lover's eyes and added, 'except of you.'

* * * * *

To-day I see her again go up between the stems of the pines in the glow of the lights amidst the cyclamens; she is beautiful as a tall plume of the maize; she has a knot of autumn roses at her throat; she has a child on her shoulder; the child holds a dove in his arms. Were only Raffaelle living to see also!

The crown of gold has come to her, though not in the way she thought.

'Ah, well, she was in prison once,' the woman, who is yellow, and shrivelled, and envious, mutters again, gathering dry sticks in the shadow on the hill side.

Umiltà goes upward, singing, the child and his dove on her breast.

A HERO'S REWARD.[1]

GUALDRO SONCINI was an old man; he had been a soldier from his youth up; he had served under Carl Alberto and Victor Emmanuel; he had been wounded in the thigh at Novara, in the hip at Solferino; he had known sickness and suffering in camp and in hospital; he had lost an arm in carrying a comrade from under the fire of the enemy's battery in his last campaign; he was seventy-five years old; he had an old wife and three little orphan penniless grandchildren; he had a small pension and heavy burdens; he was very nearly blind, but he was very cheerful, as became an old soldier. When the conscripts went by him muttering in discon-

[1] Sketched from facts.

tent, he would say to them, 'Fie for shame! It is a hard life—ay—but a fine one. None better becomes a man.'

He had had three sons once, and they had all died in battle, but no one thought much of that; so many have sons that died so. He would think of them himself very often with pride, and say to the three little hungry grandchildren, 'When you grow up, if you draw the number, you will go willingly, and do your best; your fathers did their best, poor lads, and I mine too, though it did not come to much.'

Meanwhile he was very poor.

He had helped at making cart-wheels till his age and infirmities grew great, and no one would employ him; it was hard work to face all the little hungry mouths, and he would not send one of them to the Bigallo. He lived in an attic, in a crowded and narrow street, and his wife was palsied and bedridden; nevertheless, he was always cheerful.

'Ah, lads, I was a good soldier!' he would tell the young men, and would still feel very proud; it is better to have been a brave man than a coward; it leaves a glow about the heart even when the limbs are stiff and numb with age.

Gualdro knew he had been a brave man, and he was quite happy; he would laugh with the babies, and go out in the sun on messages, and feel for the medals on his breast that he was getting too blind to see well, and now and then sit under the trees in the Cascine, and watch to see his General go riding by—his young General as he thought him who, when he could catch his eye, would give him a smile of recognition—his General, whom he would call without prefix or title, as all the city did, Lamarmora.

With him Gualdro would always have one or two of the little children and his dog.

His dog, who was as old for a dog as he for a man, had been picked up by him on the field after Magenta, where it had lain a mere puppy by the body of a dead officer. Tamburino, *anglicè* Drummer, was not at all valuable or handsome; he was half mastiff, half bulldog, grey with age, and with a broad, ugly frank face, and no tail at all; but he was the idol of the children, the guardian of the sick woman, and the friend of his master.

'Looking at Drummer, any one can see he is King Honestman, too, in his way,' would

Gualdro say, and tell, with as much pride almost as he showed his own medals, how the dog had marched and countermarched with him over the burning plains of Lombardy, and been wounded once by a spent bullet.

Altogether they were very happy, Gualdro, and the children, and the dog, though they climbed a hundred and twenty stairs to their garret, and went all of them, very often, supperless to bed.

Once or twice Gualdro was summoned for having a dog without a licence. A lady who knew him paid the fine for him; Gualdro could not understand why it was a crime to have a dog.

'And he has fought the Austrians!—tooth and claw; he himself has fought them!' he would cry. They told him that had nothing to do with it. He could not understand; he and Drummer and the babies sat in the shade or the sun as the weather was, and could not see what harm they did.

Drummer would watch the people go by with his eyes still bright under his broad forehead and his funny square mouth opened to get the air in comfortably, as nature tells a

dog to do; and when the grave General rode past them on his roan horse he would give a kindly glance to the dog as well as the veteran; and then Gualdro was happy for all the week.

'He does not forget,' Gualdro would say to himself, and it solaced him to think that his General remembered, if his country did forget, as all countries do whether they are free or fettered, regenerated or unregenerated.

Gualdro could not read and could not write, but he was no fool; he had been no mere fighting machine, but a true soldier of the War of Independence. In the days of Carl Alberto he had been smitten with the lightning fires of liberty, and had dreamed his dream, not a base or sordid one, and had known what he had wanted when he had chaunted the 'Fuor il stranier,' in moonlit summer marches, or in crowded theatres of carnival.

The leaders of the revolution might have their own baser ends, and more selfish hopes, but Gualdro had been a simple rustic soldier, and had hated the stranger, and had done his best honestly, and risking life and limb, to serve his country. That was all.

The chiefs of the national movement lived

in fine houses, and fared sumptuously every day, but the old soldier had much ado to get a litre of broth for his children's children; yet he did not complain. 'The men that had the brains, they made a good thing of it. They have sheared the lamb after saving it. As for me, I was only good to carry the knapsack,' he would say, and he knew that is not a calling which any country ever prizes very highly.

'I was only good to fight,' he would say sorrowfully, realising dimly that he had been only one of the mules that had dragged the stones for building up the temple of liberty, and that the only payment to the mules was a kick a-piece.

Yet he did not grumble, not he. He was a cheerful old man, and if he could only get something to do was happy.

Unhappily in this world something to do is not always obtainable; when you are very poor, and want it very much, it becomes almost certainly as impossible to find as the philosopher's stone.

'I used to be a smith; yes, that was my trade,' said Gualdro once when his tongue waxed warm with a little wine that was given him,

wine that was only twopence a flask, but was too dear for him to buy it for all that. 'Yes, that was my trade and my father's before me. We lived out Settimo way, ay, it was pretty then. The trees were not felled as they are now. I shoed horses. When I was a little chap I remember the Frenchmen's horses coming through; my father would not shoe them. Poor Babbo ran away, and I with him, and we hid in the hedges about the Badia. I might have done well if I had stuck to my trade, yes, but I went fighting. It seemed to me stupid to sit still and beat iron when there were enemies and tyrants to be beaten. That was my idea. I do not know that I was right. If I had stayed at my forge in Settimo perhaps the world would have wagged as well, and I been wiser. But there! what would you? One never knows! Who can say the pear is sound till he cuts it?' And then he pulled his old canvas shirt open and showed his chest with the marks of a sabre wound and a shot wound in it. 'All the scars are in front of me,' he said with pride, and perhaps in displaying them he was happier than he would have been at a smithy in Settimo, with a horse of his own and money in the

bank, and a bit of kid and some fried artichokes smoking on his board on feast days. As it was, he never tasted meat at all, and artichokes only when they were stale on the street stall. He lived in one room, and lived as best he could in a ruined house in the Pignone; unsavory, tumbledown, often inundated, with the unsavoury muddy waters of the Arno on one side, and a refuse-heap on the other.

The river at sunrise would be lovely as the green sea, and at sunset would glow with the hues of the opal, and all its mud and sand become transformed to gold; but none of the glory of it could be seen from his high chamber, with its little window buried out of sight in the damp wall. Now and again in winter or spring flood the river would break into the house, and make it chilly, nauseous, unhealthy, and go away again leaving slime and sand behind it; and that was all the grand poetic world-honoured water ever did for him.

It gave him rheumatism too, and a touch of ague. Yet he cared for it: when he was washing his shirt in it, or letting his boys paddle of summer nights, he would look at it lovingly: it did him much harm and no good, but it was a

grand thing, and he liked it. He was fond of the Arno as he was of his country; neither of them had ever done anything for him, but he was proud of them, nevertheless.

The people who cling to ideas in this way are very silly, no doubt, yet they are the only people who make life at all noble. One sad day his General died, his great General whom all the world honoured. Gualdro Soncini made one of the many mourners, as the dark, stately pomp of the great military funeral moved through the ancient streets, that had been all baptised with new names, but could not be defrauded of their old honour and their old history.

Gualdro's heart was heavier than before.

He missed the kindly smile that answered his salute; he missed pointing the great soldier out to strangers and saying proudly, 'Ecco il mio Generale—eccolo!'

A month or two later he saw the General's horse dragging the heavy, stinking cart of the manure company; of the good people who empty the cesspools of the city and pour nameless filth out over the corn-fields by way of decreasing fever and diphtheria.

Gualdro felt a knife in his heart.

'And they will give him a statue—a hundred statues!—and they let his brave horse toil there!' he said in his pain and his wrath. But then he was a simple man, and did not understand the policies of great families and vain-glorious nations, which is 'to save at the spigot and pour out at the bunghole,' as a homely English saw has it.

After that Gualdro felt more lonely. When the floods swamped him, and when the bread-pot was empty, things seemed harder to bear than before. He had never asked his General for anything, but he had always felt that in any very terrible extremity he might; and once the General had called him 'bambino mio'—'bambino mio,' and he seventy years old!—and they had both laughed, and felt that after all they were both soldiers, and so equals; and now all that was over for ever—for ever! And the horse toiled in the manure-cart, and the old man felt alone.

Still, there was Drummer, and there were the babies—the little merry brown babies, tumbling about over the old dog, and putting their little fists down his red jaws. Drummer had his own occupations, and those were serious ones. He would watch the children when they

were asleep, and snap at the flies and centipedes that approached them; he guarded the linen when it was spread out to dry on the sand by the river; and he caught rats, the big, abounding rodents that swam by the Arno, he caught them by the score with a sharp, sudden death-bite, and then flung them away as offal, however hungry he might be, for Drummer knew that he was intended by nature to have higher views touching bulls and bears, and that rats were too poor prey for him, only they worried his master, and frightened the bed-ridden woman and the babies, so he hunted them.

'He kills them like a Christian!' Gualdro would say, with pride; and the rats were the only creatures that the strong, good-humoured, valiant beast ever injured. Drummer was beloved by all the Pignone, and was perfectly happy lying by the edge of the river watching the boats, and the nets, and the washing-women, when his mind was at peace as to rats.

The fine new times that Gualdro had done his best to bring about worried him as they worried all the populace with fines and contraventions and all manner of petty legal torment-

ings, if a man did but set his chair out on the pavement, or let his dog run about, or cry his goods at wrong hours, or do any other little thing that he had been always used to do before Freedom had been heard of in street corners. Gualdro was a very honest man; he had never wittingly done any harm or cheated any one; when he could pay for his bit of bread he bought it; when he could not he went without it. Yet he was always being told that he transgressed the law; he was always seeing those long slips of printed paper which broke the heart of the poor who nine times out of ten cannot even read them.

'If a man do his duty as he sees it, and molests nobody, and has to pay his way, ought they to be at him?' Gualdro would ask in perplexity; he could not understand it.

'If one gets tormented so for nothing at all one may as well do something wicked,' said his neighbour on the stairs, a broom-maker.

'Ay, they'll let you alone then,' said a shrew, who was another neighbour. 'A year ago some brutes they set on my poor man and knifed and beat him all for nothing, and they got scot free; as for us there comes the *usciere* a hundred

times a year, if one forgets to pay a centime or sets a flower-pot on a sill.'

They were very perplexed in Pignone, but they were told it was liberty; even when some rickety chairs and a copper pot or two were raised to the dignity of 'furniture riches' and rated accordingly. The upshot of this impression, when it has had a little more time to settle down into the minds of the people everywhere, will not be comfortable for us. It will be very favourable to Nihilism.

Gualdro, who was a patient obedient person, as soldiers mostly are, was saddened by this usage, not made rebellious.

One of his babies died, the prettiest; the doctor said the great public refuse-heap hard by had given it its mortal 'ball in the throat,' as they call diphtheria, but the refuse-heap stank on by municipal permission. On the strip of garden ground by his house a grand jessamine covered the wall; he had planted it, and his landlord let him call it his own, and the flowers of it brought a few pence; they ordered him to cut it away, as it was against the law to have a shrub hang over the wall; as he delayed to do it, he was fined, and his

bush was destroyed. A scoundrel swore a debt of twenty francs against him falsely; he could not understand the summons to the court, and only called out stupidly through Pignone, 'Not a soldo do I owe, not a soldo. I never did, that the good saints know.' But the saints do not look into law courts, and at the petty tribunal a petty officer gave the verdict against him, and ordered him to pay ten francs more for contumacy. As he had not the money the *usciere*, who represents Fate to the multitude, came and took away his copper pots and pans, and the bed that was under his wife. 'Is this just?' said Gualdro, half beside himself. 'It is law!' said the *usciere*.

Florentines are a patient people; the old soldier said nothing more.

'If I had owed it I would not have minded,' he told his neighbours, and they, poor though they were, contrived amongst them to give him another bed.

'These are the fine times you fools fought for, Gualdro,' the neighbour who was a shrew would say; and Gualdro would shake his head, and, from habit's sake, take out his cold pipe, which he could not afford to light.

'It would come right if we got the republic,' said the broom-maker.

But Gualdro shook his head.

'Nay, nay; every hungry stomach in the country then would be gobbling at the public pot. That would never do.'

'Then what would?' said the broom-maker tartly. Gualdro could not tell.

An old soldier at seventy years old cannot solve problems that would have been too tough for Cavour.

The general result in the Pignone was much as it is everywhere else, to produce a sort of conviction that it was of no use trying to be decent and honest; the law worried you if you were innocent, as much as if you were not.

It is the triumph of modern governments to produce this conviction in the populace.

It was then early in summer.

The summer was the worst time for him, because the strangers were all away; and there were one or two foreign ladies for whom Gualdro went errands and did little things, with Drummer trotting at his heels; but when the vines came in flower the ladies went away, and the summer was hard to him, most of all, the close of the

summer was hard, because there was nothing to do in the city that lay baking under the sun, and there were still two little curly-headed children and the sick wife and Drummer to feed. Occasionally he got a little work, or caught some fish, or did some errands, and so rubbed on, but it was hard work, and not seldom he would go without his own bit of bread to give it to the dog. 'Sooner to him than to myself,' he would say.

One evening, having nothing to do, he took the babies out with him, and Drummer.

It was the close of a very hot day in midsummer; the heat lay in heavy mists over the city and its river, and the hills around were all pale and dust-coloured in it. Happy people, and people who though not happy yet had the means to move about or go into the country, were travelling through distant lands of glaciers and forests, or sitting out on marble terraces watching the fireflies glisten under the leaves. But in the city it was terribly oppressive, and the multitude that always remains captive when a town is called empty were loitering about the piazzas or lying on the stone benches, hot, weary, and feverish.

But the little children were merry and Drummer was joyous, and the old soldier felt at peace with the world, though it did send him law-summonses that he could not understand, and made it hard trouble for him to get his daily bread and beans.

They had gone up on to the new public drive that passes by grand old San Miniato and has so sadly spoilt the once wild hill-side, scarring it with a white seam as you look upwards at it from bridge or road below. But Gualdro was not much concerned about beauty or sweetness; the bench he sat on rested him, the air was fresher on the height, the children were toddling about with Drummer, there was some music sounding from the café hard by, gay waltz music that set the babies' feet dancing.

A lemon-seller went by with his gilded pagoda-like truck, and knowing Gualdro, gave the babies a drink for love and good-will, which did Gualdro as much good as if anybody had brought him a draught of wine. 'After all,' he thought, 'there is always some one that is kind.'

The sun went down, and the glow from its setting made the mountains beyond Vallombrosa rosy red; little stars began to shine; the grey

dusty hues of a long hot day changed to the blue shades of evening. He thought it was time to take his way homeward, for the children were fatigued with play and grew sleepy. He took one up on each arm, and began to stroll home, the dog at his heels.

When he got down from the comparatively fresh air of the hill-side into the stifling heat of the town, about the Porta Romana, there were some people shouting, scuffling, screaming, there were cries of a mad dog.

One of the dogs from the country—dogs that pass their poor lives perpetually straining at the end of a short chain, and are starved and beaten, and even thirsty all day long, since no one thinks of their wants, and their shallow water-pan is quickly dried by the sun, and made noisome by dead insects—had strayed down into the city, driven by the pangs of hunger to seek for something to devour, and there, from long ill-usage and long torment of all times, had snapped at a man who had kicked him aside, and had fallen writhing in an epileptic fit; the mere harmless canine epilepsy which soon passes if the animal be left alone.

But instead of leaving him alone, or even

inquiring what was the matter with him, the populace (always and everywhere, coward, as well as bully) had raised the cry of mad dog, and two street scavengers were hacking the dog to pieces with their iron hoes, while the guards looked on in approval. These spectacles are considered improving for the people.

The poor animal in his epilepsy was hardly conscious, though his body struggled under the agony; the street was flooded with blood, the street boys capered and howled with delight, and the man at whom the dog had flown, though only his trousers had been touched, was yelling like a mad creature himself, and crying, 'Son' morto! son' morto! Gesù m'aiuta!'

Gualdro, who looked away from the horrible sight, for he liked all dumb beasts, was hurrying by, not to let his grandchildren see the blood. Drummer, with ears pricked, and all his body quivering, was standing still, and staring at the still writhing body of his mangled brother. One of the guards threw a looped cord over his head and choked him.

'Let my dog go!' cried Gualdro. 'He has done nothing. It is not him they are crying out against.'

The guard drew the rope tighter, and held Drummer motionless, and powerless to utter a sound.

'Your brute was by when the mad dog passed,' he said. 'He may have been bitten. He must go under observation.'

'Under observation!' stammered Gualdro; 'what has he done? Let him go—pray let him go—you will choke him! Look how his eyes are starting!'

'Hold your tongue, or I will arrest you for impeding me in my duty,' said the guard; and he flung Drummer on his back by a haul at the rope. One of the dog stranglers that are employed all summer by the civic *giunta* was near at hand, and the guard beckoned him and gave him the rope; 'Throw him in the cart, and take him to the slaughter-house,' he said, attending in no way to the master of Drummer.

The old man with the child on each arm was as helpless as the dog with the noose round his neck. He implored, he wept, he even fell on his knees on the stones, and made the little terrified children kneel too. But it was of no use. The guard was immovable, and the populace was for once on the side of the law, because its own

precious safety it thought was imperilled. Gualdro, who had stood the brunt of so much smoke and the blaze of so much steel in battle, was trembling like a leaf. All the instincts of the old soldier were towards obedience; and he was bewildered, dazed, agonised, but he was patient still.

'What does it all mean?' he said, stupidly, turning his dim eyes on the faces of the crowd—faces that had no sympathy in them, for the people were all afraid for themselves, though the poor mangled sheep dog lay dead in the midst of his blood, and Drummer had been hurled into the dog-cart of the dog strangler.

'It means a municipal regulation, my friend,' said the voice of an Englishman with a good influx of irony in it. 'Municipal regulations are amongst the blessings for which you good fellows fought.'

But Gualdro did not understand.

'My dog did no harm,' he said piteously, as a low howl came from the covered cart.

'You can get him in forty days, if you pay what is wanted,' said the guard coldly, and then turned away to collar an urchin who was throwing a wooden ball about. The cart moved on;

Gualdro was left standing, the two little babies clinging to his knees.

Then suddenly he caught them up and ran with them in his arms after the cart.

'Stop, stop! Pray stop! do have pity!' he cried to them. 'I am an old soldier; I have fought in every battle, little and big: yes, I have; my poor Drummer—what is the matter with him? Give him to me—give him to me!'

But the dog-takers only laughed, and the cart was pushed on; the men with the lassoes following, looking about the empty streets for dogs.

'It is of no use running and praying,' said a beggar man who was limping by. 'They will not give him to you, no, not if it were ever so; you go to the slaughter-house in the morning; they will not have killed him; not so soon.'

'Killed him!' echoed Gualdro. It hurt him as when at Custazza he had heard them say, 'We are beaten!' and it bewildered him as that had done.

'It will be all right in the morning,' said the beggar, trying to console him. 'Do not make these men angry, or they will knock him on the head; ay, that they will.'

'But the lady pays the tax for me!'

'What has that got to do with it? Everybody pays taxes; but taxes don't give you any right at all except to pay more of them. I am glad they cannot get them out of me,' said the beggar with a grin.

Gualdro did not even hear. He ran panting after the cart, calling the men every bad name with which long years in barracks and in tent life could have stored his memory. But they went on out of his sight, throwing back to him as a last greeting a jeer and a curse. He was old and not very quick of foot, and they, out of sport or spite, or both, had gone forward at a trot, jolting the poor living burdens in their cart over the stones, regardless of the moans and howls within.

Gualdro had the two little children to carry; they were still crying; he stopped, his heart seeming to break at the thought of leaving Drummer in such hands as these—stopped and hushed the babies with a few half-conscious words, and wondered what on earth he could do. The evening was still young, but it was starless and extremely hot. The air, used as he was to it in its heat, seemed to suffocate him; there was nothing he could do, except go back to his wife,

who would be alarmed at his absence, and then go out again or wait till morning broke.

He went back, hurrying as much as his limbs stiff with age and rheumatism would allow him, and mounted the stairs to his one little room, where the old woman lay on the borrowed bed. She made her little moan about his long absence and her own pain and infirmity, being a selfish soul, and much racked with ague and fever and all the woes of age. He tried to answer her cheerfully, though the tears were all in his throat, as he got the babies out of their few clothes, and laid them, half asleep, down on the sack and old rug that served them as a cradle.

The eldest one, sleepy as she was, in her sleepiness kept sobbing and crying for To-to, which was all she could say of Drummer's name; he was used to lie close to them all night, and the child through her mist of slumber was missing his broad, good-humoured face, and the good-night kiss of his rough tongue.

'Where is the dog?' asked the old woman from her bed.

Gualdro answered, as cheerfully as he could, 'I have lost him; I must go out and look.'

'Lost him? Che, che!' grumbled the old

woman. 'He knows the city as well as a Christian. He will come scratching at the door in a minute.'

Gualdro could not speak.

'I think I had better go and look,' he said, after a pause, while he gave his wife a little bread and a drink of water—there was nothing else in the chamber.

He then went out and went across the town a long, long way, to the public slaughter-place. When he reached there it was shut for the night; he could make no one hear. He was very weary, but he would not go away; he walked to and fro, as in his earlier years he had paced to and fro when on guard in the long winter nights on the ice-cold plains of Lombardy, till some one that knew him spoke to him in the street, and said:

'What is the use of doing that? You cannot get your dog till dawn, when the gates will open for the beasts to come in off the railway. Go home and try and get some money, for without money, take my word, old Drummer will be as dead as a door-nail.'

Gualdro went homeward again, in despair. Where could he get money? His ladies were away, and his General was dead. He had

nothing to sell, since the *usciere* had taken all his pots and pans and his few sticks of furniture: and if he asked charity in the streets he would be arrested, because he had never been able to bring his pride down to get the official permission to beg as a legalised pauper, which might, perhaps, if he had asked for it, have been accorded to him under Article 102, No. 8, of the Communal and Provincial Laws.

He did not know what to do.

He would have sold even his medals to have saved Drummer; but they would have had the law on him even for that. He wandered up and down, to and fro, in the street, finding the short night very long. He could hear the howling of the dogs in this miserable place, and he knew that one was the voice of his own old friend.

He hung about there till morning broke—another sultry, heavy morning, with the sky a haze of white heat. The first wretched animals came in towards the slaughter-house: bullocks, footsore, and galled, and bruised, that, having toiled for years over the land at the plough and in the cart, were now brought to end their days there; lambs, alive and quivering, hung in long

rows on to the wooden framework of waggons, their heads downward, their eyes starting; all the sad, terrible procession of sacrifice that enters every city at dawn to feed the human multitude that calls desert animals beasts of prey, went by him in the hazy, sickly daybreak. But he scarcely noticed them; he only pressed forward in hope to save Drummer. It was still too early. He was pushed about amongst cross and sleepy underlings, and told to return at ten o'clock. It was then not five. Might he not see his dog? he asked piteously. He was told sharply, no; he must wait till he saw an Inspector.

He went back to his room in Pignone. There was no one to do anything for his wife and the children except himself. He only told them that he could not find Drummer; he could not bear to tell them the truth. The old wife began to sob, and the babies cried aloud. They wanted old Drummer; where was Drummer. A rat had sat on the rug and frightened them all night. Go, get Drummer!

Gualdro, with his heart half broken, did for them all that was needful, and warmed them a little weak coffee, and then went out again; the neighbour who was a shrew promising to look

after them in his absence. All the many dwellers of the house were out on the stairs, and were all talking of Drummer, and sorrowing for him. Some children were crying, and the men were cursing the Government.

These tyrannies of petty law in their wisdom hurt the authority of the State more with the populace than all the severity of a Draconian code against great offences. Petty laws may annoy, but can never harm the rich, for they can always evade them or purchase immunity; but petty laws on the poor are as the horse-fly of the forests on the neck and on the eyelids of the horse.

Were modern law-makers wise, they would make their laws as few, as brief, and as stern as the commands of the Decalogue. But then what would become of the Bureaucracy, and of all those hosts who live by the public as the fly by the horse?

Gualdro, with all the eager, voluble, noisy sympathy of the Pignone pursuing him, went once more on his way to the slaughter-house yard. It was ten o'clock. He was told he must wait yet another hour. The Superintendent was busy. He waited the hour, not having broken his fast. The horrid smell of blood was in the air of the

place. He had not been faint before the sight of carnage or in the face of death, but here he felt sick and trembled. The neighbouring bells were all ringing; it was a saint's day; but within, the poor beasts were dying that the holy human race might be fed.

At last some one in authority there said to m, 'What do you want here?' The person spoke roughly; he was a rough, coarse man, whom the people called, for his brutality in his office, Il Mastino.

Gualdro told him his tale, his voice and his hand shaking with agitation and weakness.

'May I not have my dog?' he said piteously, as he ended his narrative. 'Here is the tax of the year; all paid for him; a lady paid it.'

Mastino eyed the paper sharply, anxious to find it incorrect if possible.

'That has nothing to do with it,' he said savagely. 'The dog is here for surveillance. You must pay twenty francs for his maintenance and fifteen for contravention of the law in having had him loose on the street.'

'I will try!' faltered Gualdro with dry lips and sinking heart. 'Oh, for the love of God let me see him!'

'You can see him if you bring the money. But you cannot remove him till forty days.'

'But what has he done?'

'Do not answer me,' thundered the man in authority. 'If you answer me I will put a brace of bullets through your cursed beast's head. You will find I am master here!'

For it is thus that the public which pays the taxes is answered by those who are its servants.

'Let me see him!' stammered Gualdro beside himself with pain. The man in authority turned on his heel. 'Send that madman out of the yard,' said he to one of his underlings.

The underling, who was more kindly of nature (for an Italian is always kind in small things when he is not changed into an *impiegato*, a creature that is always insolent, cringing, venal or brutal according to the company he is in), touched the old soldier now upon the arm and spoke to him.

'Go and get the money, or you can do nothing here; and if you provoke him, he will have your brute killed, ay, that for sure.'

'But let me see him!' pleaded Gualdro, two slow tears coming down his old bronzed cheeks. The underling hesitated.

'Well, I will let you do that, though it will cost me my place if he ever know. Go out by that door and wait for me.'

Gualdro staggered out and waited; it seemed to him ages before the man rejoined him.

'He is out of the way,' the man whispered, at last returning. 'Come, I will give you a glimpse of the dogs. Poor brutes! they get a hard time enough of it here.'

Gualdro followed him through many winding ways to a low door in a passage; the door opened into a narrow low dark cell, so dark that scarcely anything was visible except some eyeballs glaring in the gloom. But Gualdro heard a sound that made his heart leap; it was the wild, choked bark of Drummer.

As his sight grew accustomed to the darkness he saw four dogs, two large, two small, chained in that infernal hole, with collars so tight that they could scarcely breathe, the chains passing from right to left so that they could not stir; in torture that men now-a-days would not inflict on the vilest murderer that fouls the earth, yet to which they think nothing of condemning the innocent dumb beasts that have done no harm, and only ask to live in peace their simple humble lives.

'That is the way we wiseacres have of preventing dogs from going mad,' said the underling with a grin.

Gualdro did not heed; he had fallen on his knees by Drummer. Drummer was throttling himself in his frantic joy with efforts to get free to join his master.

'And to think he has fought the Austrians!' said Gualdro with a sob in his throat.

He was an old soldier, and not much given to passionate emotion at any time, but with his hands holding the dog's head to his breast he kissed him, he wept over him, he clung to him, he swore bitter furious oaths that surely would be pardoned like the oath of Uncle Toby, were there any angels in creation to hear.

But the man behind him shook him by the shoulder and forced him up. 'Come away if you would not ruin me and yourself, and get the dog killed too,' he said, not unkindly, but dragging him upward. 'If Mastino should find us here he would put me out of the gates for ever, and shoot your poor beast or have him poisoned. Come.'

'Wait quietly, my bambino; wait in patience, my comrade, my good dear friend, my old Tamburino!' murmured Gualdro in passionate fondness

to the dog, who crouched down obedient to his bidding, but shivered in his chains and moaned, while his four-footed companions in captivity howled in chorus with him, a choked wailing howl, for they were half-strangled by their fetters.

Gualdro got out into the light of day once more, how he never knew; and staggered into the street.

'And to think he has fought the Austrians!' he said with a curse in his throat.

'Go and get the money,' whispered the underling who had befriended him. 'They will not let him out, but perhaps they will let him live.'

'Live in that hole! choked like that!'

'It is the way we cure mad dogs,' said the other man, with a sardonic grin.

'But he is not mad!'

'But he will be mad. A few days of darkness and chains will do it; then we can kill him, or send him to the doctors to be cut up; that is our way.'

Gualdro groaned aloud.

'O devils incarnate!' he yelled. 'And the dog went through Solferino and Magenta, and was wounded at Custozza, and fought Austrians tooth and claw—fought them himself!'

'We've had heroes enough,' said the man with a grin. 'We want money now. Go find the money. Then perhaps you can get him—perhaps.'

Gualdro went home; his head swam, his limbs shook; he was old and he had eaten nothing.

He went home to his own old quarters, where the Law had cut down his jessamine tree, and the Law had taken the bed from under his wife; the law of the land he had fought to free.

He gathered the people about him on the rough yellow shores by the river where Drummer had used to sit and watch the outspread linen; only the very poor people, the men filling the carts with sand, the men dipping their huge square nets in the water, the women washing clothes in the stream, the children playing under the sunburnt river wall.

They all came round him as he staggered into the midst of them, his grey hair streaming back, his bronzed face looking black and ashen grey; for they saw that something grave had befallen him, and Italians are quick in sympathy, if they be not strong in action.

In bitter words he told his tale.

'And he fought the Austrians!' he cried when

he had told it. 'Tooth and claw he fought them; he has the marks of their powder and ball on him still; he was a small thing at Solferino, but never did he flinch; he has been braver than men, and truer; he fought the Austrians, and he lies in chains. It is vile—vile—vile—chained there, and in the dark! a creature that has no sin; and all over the land there goes the murderer or the robber, free to murder or rob again! It is vile—vile—vile! And in a few days he will be mad or dead. For how can I find the money they ask? I would sell the medals they gave me—ay, I would sell them for the dog. But they would put me in prison for that. What can I do? What can I do?'

'You shall have all the money we have!' the people cried. 'You are an old soldier, and were a brave one. You shall have all the pence we can get. Yes, the law is vile. There is the freedom you fought for, poor soul! But that was no fault of yours, no fault at all!'

Then quickly vying one with another, they poured out all they had, diving in ragged trousers pockets and under rough torn skirts to find the little they all were worth.

Close-fisted these people are and very narrow

in means, and Stenterello is their type on the popular stage, yet they can be capable of noble and generous moments. This was one. They were only poor boatmen and fishermen, washer-women and straw-plaiters, and beggars some of them, yet was there not one that did not give; scores of battered copper pieces and here and there a crumpled note of fifty centimes, and one little tiny child, a brown, curly, dirty cherub like Del Sarto's children, ran into the house and brought out a whole bright centime-bit that had been given her to buy a bunch of cherries. 'Take for poor To-to!' she cried. 'Take my money too for To-to!'

Then Gualdro broke down and hid his face in his hands. Alas! the money when counted only came up to fifteen francs; there were not altogether forty people there on that sunburnt shore, and most of those who had given would be pinched of wine or of tobacco for the rest of the week themselves. It was only fifteen francs, when all was said and done that could be, and the little crowd stood wistfully eyeing the heap of metal with the little shining one-centime bit lying uppermost.

'Perhaps they would let me have him for

that?' said Gualdro with doubt, and yet with hope in his mind.

'Surely they would, if you said you would pay all the rest. Everyone knows you are an honest man,' said one of the freshwater fishermen.

Gualdro sighed wearily; he doubted whether that was enough.

'I will try,' he said, while the tears fell down his face. 'The Saints and Our Lady reward you; you have been very good to me.'

Then he turned to return to where the dog was, not waiting to take bit or drop.

'Bring To-to back!' piped the little child who had given her centime-piece.

Gualdro stooped, kissed her, and went.

When he reached the slaughter-house and asked for the official who had the keys of life and death for the poor four-footed prisoners, they took him once more before the man whom the populace called Il Mastino. The old soldier held out to him, trembling, the fifteen francs, the coppers filling his quivering hands.

'My neighbours have helped me,' he said. 'I could not get any more. It is fifteen francs. Would you take it and let me have him? I will work day and night to pay the rest; I will go

without bread. Oh! for the love of God, do let me have him, the poor, poor innocent thing!'

The man whom they called Il Mastino swore a fierce oath, and yelled to him, 'Out of the place, you beggar! If you say one word more, I will blow the brains out of your dog, and if one shot does not do for him he shall have two; he shall have three! I am the master here.'

Then he had Gualdro put out of the gates.

The old man stood in the blazing sun, mute and blind as a statue is. No hope was left him; nothing but a blank despair.

A lady passed by half-an-hour later, and saw him still there. She was a stranger in the city, but she was struck by the strange look of the old soldier standing in the full sun, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his medals hanging on his rough blue shirt, his hands full of coins.

She paused, touched his arm, and asked if he were ill.

He drew his breath with effort, and stared upon her stupidly; she spoke to him again, and he understood.

He told her his tale.

She was in haste, and could not wait there, but she read truth in every word he spoke, in

every line of his worn ashen face; she drew out her purse, and poured thirty francs into his hand, and bade him be of good hope.

'With that you must get your dog. They cannot refuse you, surely. Go in and show them you have all they ask.'

Gualdro listened bewildered and incredulous, then an immense joy broke in on him.

'It is the Madonna herself that helps me, come in human guise!' he cried, and would have stooped and kissed the hem of her garment, but she was already gone with the summer light on her path.

Gualdro drew himself erect, smoothed out the notes, and with his pulses beating high and firm, knocked once more at the gates of the place of death.

It was now full noon.

'I have brought the money—all the money,' he shouted aloud. 'Now he is safe; now he is mine. I have all the money!'

Everyone in the yard was silent.

'I have all the money,' he cried again. 'Our Lady has come on earth in a woman's shape, a woman with fair hair. I have all the money. Dear sirs, take the money and give me my dog; let me see my dog.'

The tyrant whom the populace called Il Mastino came forward; he looked sullen, angry, and ashamed.

'Your dog is dead,' he said.

'Dead!'

The word rang through the yard far above the lowing of cattle, the shrieks of swine, the bleating of lambs, the shouting of men.

'He choked himself with his chain; it was an accident,' said the tyrant, and his face flushed with heavy rage; he was safe in saying it; who could prove that the dog had been poisoned?

The teeth of Gualdro set; his eyes blazed with a fearful light; his face was dark and terrible as on a day of battle his foes had seen it.

'Bring out my dog,' he said. 'Bring out my dog, living or dead.'

Awe fell upon the people.

'Show him the dog,' said the tyrant with a dull shame upon his sullen face. There was silence, and on it the heavy breathing of the old man sounded like the breathing of an ox that has been struck with the pole-axe but not killed.

Then they brought the dog to his master. He was dead.

His eyes protruded, his mouth foamed, his

body was swollen. Never more would Drummer sit on the sands by the river and watch the children play.

Gualdro stooped, looked, kissed the poor disfigured swollen body as he would have kissed a little dead child. Then he rose up, and with one mighty blow struck the tyrant who had killed his old comrade backward to the earth.

As he did so he laughed aloud.

'He fought the Austrians, he and I! We fought for Freedom!'

And with those words he choked, and dropped down dead, by the side of his dead dog.

The wise men who cut up dogs alive said he had died of heat apoplexy; the people of Pignone knew better than that.

The poison-swelled body of Drummer was thrown out to swell a manure heap; the body of his master was cast into the common death-ditch of the poor of the city. The bedridden wife died very soon; the little children, starving and miserable, were taken by people who had not bread enough to feed themselves. No one noticed, no one lamented; an old soldier and a dog were missed a little while by a few people from the

sandy shore by the river, and one little child said often for a week, 'Why did not To-to come back? I gave my whole centime.'

That was all.

The old hero had had his reward!

BIRDS IN THE SNOW.

THERE was a very hard winter in the world. It was a hard winter everywhere, and the snow fell over land and sea so heavily, so blindingly, so continually, that ships were wrecked, trains were blocked, posts were stopped, and traffic well-nigh came to an end in many of the districts even of Southern England, and how much more so in the always cold bleak North. Even down in Devon snow was deep and ice was thick—even in mild, moist Devon, where mostly in winter time the roses blow, and the south winds too, and all is green at Yule.

Some little people who lived at an old vicarage on the Dart river did not know what to make of it. None of them, except Ray the eldest, who

was seven years old, had ever seen snow lie on the ground at all; he had, and knew all about it, because he had spent a Christmas-tide on the moors of the East Riding with his godmother; but his brothers and sisters, Rob and Tam, and Dickie and the little twins Susie and Nellie, never had seen the earth white in this way before, and they were very much delighted and very much alarmed, which is a state of mind that has its pleasures at all ages, and its pains too.

These six little mortals lived in a vicarage, and their father was the vicar, and mother, alas for them! they had none, for she had gone away into the sky (so they were told), when little Susie and Nellie came down from there on to earth. 'Perhaps it is the down off mamma's wings,' said little Rob, who could remember her very well, and cried for her still, when he saw the fine snow-flakes come falling down through the air. 'If she had wings, I am sure she would come to us,' said Ray, wistfully looking up. 'I don't believe she has wings; I don't.' 'But papa says she is an angel, and angels always have,' said Rob, who was very positive. 'She would come to us if she could fly,' said Ray;—'at least, if God would let her,' he added on reflection. 'Don't you

think, if she said to Him, I want to kiss Rob and Ray and Tammie because they miss it so, He wouldn't say no?' Rob thought a minute, then said to his brother, 'Papa always says "No," so p'rhaps God does too.'

'P'rhaps!' sighed Ray with a tired voice.

'No' was always said to them, and how much sorrow that means in the life of a child!

The vicarage was an old long wooden house overrun with creepers, the very house to be a paradise for children and dogs, with all kinds of deep old casements and chimney-places, and corner cupboards and pannelled passages; the very place for twilight romps and firelit stories, for fun and play, and mirth and mischief. But fun and play, and mirth and mischief, were all a quartette frowned on at the vicarage, and though they crept in at times because they never can be wholly absent where six children are, yet they came in timidly and were in hiding for the most part, and never laughed out lustily or scampered about without fear. For a cold dark shadow was upon the house and the hearts of its children; and this shadow was that of their father. He was the vicar of the out-of-the-world parish of Goldenrod, that lay on the banks of the Dart in

a secluded part of the county, as Herrick's did before him; but he was in every way unlike that bright-hearted and genial country priest. Unhappily for his children, he was of a taciturn and gloomy nature, very mean too, and very harsh, and the sound of his heavy foot along the passages made Rob and Ray flee trembling, and the younger morsels cry. What little tenderness he had ever had was buried with his wife under the big green yews on the south side of the church, and the children were afraid of him; sadly and terribly afraid.

Their father was a very good man; that is to say, he was very truthful, very honest, very laborious, never shrank from any duty however distasteful, and never indulged in any pleasure however tempting. But he was a stern man and rigid, and he was also very mean; 'close-fisted,' Keziah called it. His parish was immense in extent, and very poor in what it rendered to him. There was scarcely a well-to-do person in it, and the vicar, though he had a snug sum in the county bank and was by no means straitened, lived like a very poor man too, from inclination rather than from necessity; his thoughts were apt to be sordid, and his laws were apt to be harsh.

They were very happy very often indeed, because there were the old mossy orchards and the broad green meadows, and the hedges, and the woods, and the cattle, and the chickens, and the huge kitchen, where they could curl on the wooden settles, and eat their porridge, and hear wonderful tales from Keziah, who was cook, and nurse, and dairywoman, and housewife, all in one. Keziah loved them; she had seen them all born, and, when their mother had lain dying, had promised never to leave them, and she kept her word, though she was a buxom woman, much beloved, and might have married the rich miller that had the water-mill eight miles away down the river. But there were many things Keziah wished to do for them that she could not do, because she never disobeyed her master, and she had to give them water when she would have given them milk, and cold porridge when she would have given them hot bread, and was often ashamed at the darned and threadbare clothes in which she had to array their little bodies—'the children that ought to be the first in the parish!' she would say to herself. 'It is good to be a saint, no doubt; but it is bad to be a skinflint too.' For a skinflint she called her master, in the secrets of her soul.

When the snow fell, she called him so more bitterly than ever.

The snow made all the little people very cold, and she could not set big oaken logs and good cannel coal roaring with flame up all the chimneys, as she would have liked to do, and Goldenrod grew very damp and chilly.

'Run out, my chicks, and get warm that way,' she said to them when the white covering that was so strange to them stretched over field and wold, and made the leafless trees and the swollen river look quite black against it.

Ray and Rob were taught their lessons by their father in his study, a little dark, close place that was as terrible to them as if it had been a torture-chamber, for their acquaintance with letters was small and with the cane large, and their canings were always given them there. But this morning they were free, for their father had been called away to a dying parishioner on the other side of the big brown moor that shelved away from the edge of their orchards. So Rob and Ray ran out into the air and dragged their little brothers with them, and the babies even in their wooden cart, and romped about, and raced, and slid, and pelted, and danced, and made them-

selves merry, as though no cane were lying on the study table, and no blurred copy-books waiting, grim and grimy. They played at sledging, of which they had some prints in Christmas papers, and made believe the babies were princesses; then they played at being Napoleon at Moscow, whose story Ray had just come to in their 'Markham's History,' and were so delighted with their marches and battles, and their own deaths and burials in the snow, that they never heard the one step which at all times sent a tremor of fear through them. The cold voice of the vicar cleft the cold air like a knife.

'Are your lessons done?'

Rob, who was burying Tammie in the snow, and Ray, who was carrying Dickie as a frost-bitten soldier of the Old Guard on his shoulders, both heard, and their innocent sport ceased as a dog's play ceases at the harsh crack of a whip.

Ray, grown white as the snow, alone spoke.

'We have done no lessons, papa.'

'What have you done, then?'

'We have been at play.'

'Very well. Go into the study.'

Rob began to cry, and Ray's lips quivered. They knew what the order meant.

'It was my fault, master, all mine,' cried Keziah, running out. But the vicar put her aside.

'You spoil the children, that is well known,' he said coldly. 'But the boys are too old not to know their own duty.'

Keziah spoke in vain; the boys were bidden go to the study.

'Whip only me, papa,' said Ray timidly, 'only me, please, because, if I had stayed in, Rob would have stayed in too.'

The vicar in his inmost soul recognised the generosity of the plea, and felt proud of his little son, but he did not seem to have heard it, and he gave both equal punishment upon the palms of their small sunburnt cold hands. Then they were shut in to do their lessons, with two hunches of dry bread instead of dinner.

The vicar was a man who held discipline in high esteem and enforced it.

They did their lessons, Ray quickly, Rob tardily, both watering the pages of primer and copy-book with scalding tears. Then they huddled together in the deep bay of the one narrow window to hear each other repeat what they had had to learn by rote. The casement looked on the lawn

at the side of the house; on the grass was a big old hawthorn-tree, and under the tree were huddled together, like themselves, scores of birds.

'Do look at the birds,' says Ray. 'How pluffed out they look and how dull, and all their feathers stick upright.'

'They're cold,' said Rob thoughtfully, and added with fellow-feeling, as he heard the sound of dishes and knives and forks in the adjoining chamber:

'P'rhaps they're hungry too.'

'Hungry?' repeated Ray, who had never thought how birds lived. Then the colour flushed back into his little pale face, he jumped up, and upset all the lesson-books.

'Of course they are hungry—how silly I am! —the ground is frozen—they eat worms and seeds, and now they can't get any. Oh, the poor, poor, *poor* little things!'

He jumped off the window-seat, got his dry bread, and jumped on again, threw open one of the leaded window-panes, and crumbled up his bread and flung it out to the birds. Instantly they darted down, a motley little throng; brown sparrows, grey linnets, speckled thrushes, chaffinches with their variegated wings, three big

blackbirds, one tiny blue tomtit, and many robins. They were no longer dull; they hopped and pecked and fluttered and chirped to each other and ate in concert, and were very much better behaved than a famished crowd of human beings ever would have been.

The great hawthorn-tree spread above them, glittering with icicles on every branch, the white hard smooth snow was beneath them, the bright-natured feathered things soon grew themselves again, and their merry chirping made the frosty air alive with *Lieder ohne Wörte*, as gaily as if the hawthorn-tree were in flower and they at work in it making their nests. Rob and Ray were in ecstasies; they hung against the casement, pouring out showers of crumbs, laughing and half-crying in delight at their clever and wonderful discovery that the birds in the snow had been hungry. They never remembered that they would be very hungry themselves, for in their excitement and sympathy they had crumbled away both bits of bread. They watched the little multitude eat every crumb, shake out their feathers and fly away. One robin flew up to the lower boughs of the hawthorn, and sang as if he were deputed by the rest to speak their common praise and thanksgiving.

'Oh, how lovely!' cried Ray with clasped hands and caught breath. 'Oh, how beautiful! Oh, how clever of you, Rob, to remember they were hungry.'

'And me who isn't clever;' said Rob with a little chuckle of content.

'What are you doing at the window, boys?' said their father's voice.

All their joy ceased, and the robin flew away. Rob was the one this time to answer.

'We gived our bread to the dicky-birds. It was me thought of it.'

'All your bread?'

'Yes, papa; both bits.'

The vicar frowned.

'Then you may go hungry until your tea-time; and remember that I will have no folly of the kind again. Keep your crusts for worthier objects. Birds are mere thieves. They steal fruit and grain; and it is God's merciful provision that frost should come to aid, amidst other of His means, in the destruction of their numbers. It is very impious to interfere with God's designs.'

Ray's face grew very weary and perplexed; Rob's very grave and resolute.

'God kills birds?' Rob asked at last.

His father replied, 'The frost God sends kills them—yes.'

'I don't like God, then,' Rob said, after a little while.

'Hush!' said Ray. 'God is good. Papa it is that makes some mistake.'

Their father grew grey with horror, and stony white with rage. Were these blasphemers his own children?

They were once more punished alike. They were this time flogged instead of being caned, and their little stiff hands were set to write in large crooked characters, 'Frost is a provision of nature, instituted by the mercy of God, to destroy the numbers of birds that devastate the autumn crops of farmers and destroy the buds of gardeners' summer fruits.'

'It is not true,' said Ray between his teeth, as his hands travelled painfully over the long sentence. 'I am quite sure it is not true.'

'No, it isn't true,' said his echo, Rob, whose chubby, fat fingers could scarcely manage, at the best of times, to make a round O, and now that they were numbed with cold could not do it anyhow. 'I don't care for the farmers,' added Rob. 'The farmers trap the bunnies; that they do.'

Ray did not say anything; his heart was too heavy for talk; he had read in one of the story-books at his godmother's of a northern country where a sheaf of wheat is tied up above the doorway for the frozen birds in winter-time; he wished they were in that country. He and Rob cried themselves to sleep that night, for their little bones were all aching, and both their hearts too.

In the morning, when they got up, they ran to the window. It was scarcely light; a big white moon was just vanishing over the brown edge of the moor; snow had fallen all night, the duck-pond was frozen over, the cold was great; on the sill of their casement there lay a little dead bird.

It was a young goldfinch.

Ray choked all over as he saw it; Rob's cheeks grew red with rage.

'Oh, the poor, poor, poor little dear!' they sobbed together, and life seemed so dreadful to them both that they clung crying to one another. This hard, cold, white world in which God let the dickey-birds die—it frightened them as they had been frightened when they heard the sods beaten down above the grave where their mother's body was.

Ray looked up suddenly with a great light in his eyes.

'I will give the birds my breakfast, and papa may kill me!'

'Me too,' said Rob, who would not be behind in any act or word, though his heart gave a terrible throb, for he was very hungry this chilly morning.'

'It will hurt to go without anything,' he whispered; 'won't it hurt, Ray?'

'Of course it will hurt,' said Ray, with scorn in his steadfast, shining eyes. 'It hurt all the martyrs, but they did it.'

Rob shut his little, firm, rosy mouth, and resolved to demur no more.

Ray was always telling him about the martyrs, but Rob did not care much for them; he cared more for the bunnies in the traps.

'Let us go,' said Ray; and together, hand in hand, they trotted down the old dark, steep, oak stairs.

The children always had their first meal in the kitchen, for the convenience of Keziah and the quietude of their father. They all sat round the deal table before the fire, the little ones in their high chairs, Rob and Ray on wooden stools.

For breakfast they had porridge sometimes; this morning they had milk-and-water in their mugs, and bread, and Keziah for a treat added honey, 'because it is so nigh Yule,' as she said, for it was the twenty-third of December.

Ray looked at the honey and bread.

'Is it my own, this?'

'Yes, dear,' said Keziah, wondering.

'I may eat it or not eat it as I like?'

'For sure, my dear. What big eyes you make, my Raidie, for nought.'

Ray looked at his bread with a swelling heart. He had all the hunger of a seven-year-old country boy; but he saw in his fancy all the birds of the world lying dying. He rose up and took his bread in his hands, and, with a glance at his brother, went to the kitchen door. Rob, with a tear rolling down each cheek, bravely grasped his bread and followed. Their nurse did not notice them, her back was turned as she fed the little twin girls.

'Papa may kill us, but God won't be angry,' said Ray calmly, and never one of the martyrs he loved had felt more solemn and more sure. Then he began to crumble his bread and throw it out on the snow.

Rob took one big bite that he could not help, then valorously flung his away in large morsels.

From a lattice above them the voice of their father thundered.

'I will have no such waste in my household. Disobedient and wicked children! is my word not law?'

'He may kill me, I do not mind,' said Ray with a pale firm face.

Rob frowned and looked surly.

'It isn't waste. It 'ud have been in our tummies, and now it's in the dick-birds'.'

Meanwhile the feathered multitude of the old hawthorn-tree and all the hedges round, were flocking joyous round to share the alms.

Their father's step came down the stairs in haste, and called Keziah.

'Job Stevens has cut his hand off chopping furze; he is at the point of death; they have come for me this moment;—take these children in, and lock them in the study; they will have their chastisement when I return.'

'Yes, your reverence,' said Keziah in amazement. 'But, sir—Job Stevens's is sixteen mile if one—and in the snow——'

'I must walk, of course,' said her master

hastily; 'no horse could get along. That is nothing. Lock these boys in, and do not let them out till I come back.'

Then the vicar threw his cloak about him, and went out towards the moor in the teeth of the savage north wind. Rob and Ray stood motionless.

Their nurse came out to them.

'My darlings, you heard the orders that the master gave,' she said, with the water in her honest eyes.

Rob threw his fat arms about her.

'Yes, but he's gone, Nursie; *you* won't lock us in?'

Keziah hesitated; and kissed his curls. Ray's face changed from white to rosy red and then grew white again.

'We must be locked in, Rob,' he said sadly. 'We musn't get nurse blamed.'

'Oh, the noble little lad you are, my Raidie!' cried Keziah, and sobbed over him. So locked in they were. At one o'clock she brought them their dinners; and looked wistful and longing. 'His reverence said not till he comes back,' she muttered, stroking Ray's hair.

'Never mind, Nursie,' murmured Ray, 'we

do very nice here. We've done our lessons, and we can play.'

'What's there to play with?' groaned Rob, who was lying on what he called his 'tummy' underneath the table.

'There's ourselves,' said Ray

Keziah locked them in, her heart more bitter against her master than ever it had been in all the years that would have been, but for the children, very joyless and very thankless.

'Them's just cherubs, and he's a brute. He as drinks the blessed wine every sacrament-day, and should know better!' she muttered in her wrath. Had she been learned in hagiology, she would have wished that her master could swallow a spider in the holy wine like German St. Narbert, and be blessed with a beautiful spirit ever afterwards.

The day wore slowly on; a snowy, blowing, boisterous day, dark and dreary. When twilight fell the vicar had not come back. 'There's reason in roasting eggs,' thought Keziah. 'I must let 'em out now. I'll tell him as they've been in all day, and he knows as me ain't a one to fib.'

So she let them out. Rob rushed with a

bound and a shout down the passage; Ray came with a slow step, wondering if letting them out would get his nurse into trouble.

'Master's rare late,' said the man who did odd jobs. 'Mappen he'll sleep at squire's?'

'Ay, I shouldn't wonder that he do,' answered Keziah. The squire's was the biggest house at Tamsleigh, the village where the furze-cutter Job Stevens lay on his death-bed.

'Sure he's staying at squire's, and a more natural thing than what he often do,' she thought, as she did the bolts and bars, and shut the shutters, and told the odd man that he had better sleep upon the premises, as master was away.

No one felt anxious. The vicar had gone to Tamsleigh, and, seeing how bitter and wild the day was, had stayed to sleep at his old friend's: what more likely?

The children had a merry time while the snow fell and the winds blew; Keziah was a merry soul by nature, and had all kinds of funny stories, and, saying it was next but one to Christmas Eve, roasted apples for them, and stuck the apples full of cloves, and set them bobbing in a bowl of currant wine in the old game that Ben Jonson sings of in his carol.

It was quite late, quite eight o'clock, when the children went to bed.

'And please God take care of the birds in the snow. Amen,' said Ray at the close of his bedside prayers.

'Amen,' said Rob, winking and sleepy.

No one was anxious at all that night, but when the morning came, and the noon passed, and their father had not returned, a great alarm spread itself from the servants to the children.

The weather had become terrible. The snow fell perpetually, the air was very dark, the winds were very rough; such a day had not been seen in Devon for over twenty years; and away where the sea was, ships and barks were tossing in the snowstorm in sore peril.

'Where can the master be?' said Keziah in great perplexity. It would be impossible to stay at the squire's at Tamsleigh, for the morrow was Christmas-day, and what would the church be without its church service?

The parish was a very scattered one; a few farms, a few cottages, with miles between each, spread over the moorland, and about the vicarage and church itself there were only a few poor houses; the only house of any importance was the squire's over at Tamsleigh. The few people,

however, who did dwell near came—dropping in as the short day wore itself on, and each had some darker suggestion, some ghostlier remembrance than the last to offer in consolation.

Ray stood listening with big startled eyes. He was happy because his nurse had given him a sieve-full of grain for the birds, yet he felt a dull sense of something dreadful being near. Rob sang, and raced, and shouted, and played at his pleasure; the terrible snowstorm had no terrors for him.

'It is passing strange,' said Keziah anxiously, and knew not what to do, for it was not weather to send man or beast over the moor, and the vicar might only scold if she did send, supposing he was safe and well at Tamsleigh great hall; he always hated 'a fuss.'

She did not know what to do.

But at twilight, or rather just as the black day was merging into the yet blacker night, and the mounds of snow were rising higher and higher against windows and door, there came a poor old pedlar who had struggled through the storm with his pack on his back, and was half frozen, and begged shelter.

He was a man well known in the district.

They had him in and set him in the chimney-corner, and gave him mulled wine and the promise of a bed; but scarce had he come to his full senses out of his cold and his fright than he asked for the vicar, and when he heard that as yet the master of the house was not at home he got up in his agitation, though his limbs were all stiff as statues with rheumatism.

'But I passed his reverence yester eve, coming for home above Tamsleigh,' he shouted. 'The Lord save us! the Lord save us! Sure as I be a living soul, he's lost on the moor.'

The few neighbours who were gathered in the kitchen screamed aloud, and the children listening grew pale.

'Art' sure 'twas master?' cried Keziah.

'Lord bless us, I be sure!' reiterated the pedlar. 'He gev me good-even and said as how he'd be here long afore me, but I struck aside to take some hooks and eyes and thread to Dame Carew as she'd ordered of me, and so we parted company, and I slep' at Carew's hut and come on i' the morn. Lord save us! he's a dead man!'

In the bustle and outcry that succeeded no one noticed the children for a few moments till Rob shrieked out,—

'Raidie's dead too!'

It was then seen that Ray had fainted.

In a little while he was brought round, and opened his eyes bewilderingly.

'Father wouldn't help the birds!' he murmured, and shuddered, and wept.

Keziah, with more grief on her shoulders than she felt it right for one lone woman to have to bear, carried Ray up to his little bed, and bidding him not to fret so, because there was always hope, ran downstairs, stormed at the pedlar for having been such a fool as to speak so before the children, and then took counsel with her neighbours as to what was best to do.

The men volunteered to go out in search, but there were only four or five of them, and two of them were very old. Still, out they went with their horn lanterns and their pick-axes, and the thick falling snow soon hid them from sight.'

They thought of going up to the church-tower and ringing the two bells that were there; but they reflected that it would be of no use, because the wind was so high that the bells could have no chance of being heard. So the men went out to search as best they could in the wild night, and their frightened women sat for the most part

in the kitchen of the vicarage, taking a strange and terrible pleasure in hearing the pedlar cry a hundred times, 'Lord save us! he's a dead man!' till Keziah told him to go to bed for an old fool, which at last reluctantly he did.

The women sat over the fire and sipped spiced wine, and told each other horrible tales of things their fathers and forefathers had done or known, with many a 'He says, says he,' occurring in their narrative.

Keziah sat up by the bedside of Rob and Ray; Rob slept, but Ray lay wide awake, and ever and again he shivered and moaned; 'Papa wouldn't help the birds—he wouldn't—and I *know* God was angry.'

The long night wore away, the winds never ceasing to howl, the snow never ceasing to fall. At daybreak the men returned; having found nothing. They said they had searched all the moor for eight miles, but in real truth, though they did not know it, they had scarcely been a mile from home, having only gone round and round in a circle, not seeing where they were in the darkness. The morning broke grey and dreary; the snow fell still, but the winds dropped. Keziah chose the youngest and

strongest of the men, and bade him strive to get across to Tamsleigh. It was hard to do and an errand of danger, for the paths were all obliterated and communication of every kind stopped, but the man was a bold young fellow and promised to do his best. 'Though as for that,' he muttered, 'his reverence is a dead man if he's out all this freezin' night.' The other men went up to the church tower and set the bells tolling; the wind had fallen, and it was possible that in the more distant houses they might be heard and some help or some news come.

It was now eleven o'clock in the morning, the hour at which the service of Christmas-day should have begun. The church was a little dark dismal place; here and there it had been brightened with a bit of holly or a bough of bearberry-tree; the vicar did not approve such follies, and there was little done to relieve the bare stone walls, the square box of a pulpit, the tiny chancel dismal and damp as any dungeon. As the weather cleared a little the women dropped in, in their red cloaks, and made a glow in the darkness, but they did not stay, for the church was very cold, and it seemed more cold and horrible having no

prayer there on Christ's morn and the pastor maybe frozen dead in some snowdrift.

At the vicarage Keziah tried in vain to read the morning service to the children by the kitchen fire; her voice faltered and their attention wandered. They were all grave and frightened, even the twin babies, and Ray sat in the window-seat with his face pressed against the glass, quite silent. The look of the boy frightened his nurse almost more than the loss of her master.

'He do take things to heart so,' she said to herself, with a sigh.

It was of no use to try and read; she closed the big black prayer-book, and let the startled parishioners come in; some of them had plodded many miles over the snow not to miss the blessing of the Christmas prayer, and they found the church empty and the vicar absent. All were sure that he was dead; surer yet, when a man, at great risk to himself, came over from Tamsleigh Great House to say the squire trusted that his reverence had reached home safely.

'Didn't I tell ye truth, ye unbelievin' Jews?' said the pedlar, who enjoyed his own importance as a sharer in this terrible history.

There could be no doubt now. The vicar had

left Tamsleigh, refusing all the squire's offers, and had set forth to walk home.

Everyone there knew that he must have lost his way, and in all likelihood perished.

'It do come like a judgment,' whispered Keziah to a friend out of the children's hearing. 'Ay, it do. He scolded and punished them dear little souls just for feeding the frozen-out birds! And now—now he know himself what it is—death in the snow.'

Rob began to cry because the women were crying and he was frightened. Ray never shed a tear nor said a word; he only thought to himself with an unutterable horror, 'God was angry!'

Christmas morning began to pass away. The beef lay unroasted; the pudding, that had been in its pot all night, boiled madly unnoticed; the bells of the church tolled without ceasing. Folks began to come in from the outlying parts of the parish as the skies cleared and the frost made the snow passable. They all brought terrible tales of the past day and night; of sheep frozen to death, of carts blocked, of travellers lost, of horses killed, of boys drowned by the splitting ice, and of hamlets shut off from each other. It was even rumoured that the great train from London,

twenty miles away, was standing still all the night with its freight of passengers unable to move, and that some of them had been frozen to death.

Keziah listened with a beating heart to all these histories; it was now three o'clock; she had put away the Christmas dinner and fed the children on milk porridge, and kept them quiet round her. There was no love in them to agitate their little souls for their missing father, but the sense of some great calamity around weighed on them and kept them still and frightened. Ray was mute, and scarcely moved.

By four it was once more quite dark. The villagers hung about, cowed and afraid like the children. Christmas-day was passing and there had been no service in the church. It seemed to them a thing so terrible that the sin of it would lie on them for ever.

All the hushed whitened moor was without a sound; the safely-folded sheep bleated now and then, and the cattle lowed in the byre; that was all; otherwise, a silence like that of death enwrapped the village and the church, and the people dared not speak above their voices. All at once Keziah rose and took the two little girls, one

on each of her own strong arms, with their woollen hoods pulled over their flaxen heads.

'Christ's Day must not go by without a prayer said in His church,' she said to the folks in her kitchen. 'Let us go and pray there for master. 'Twill save the day from heathendom.'

She went out into the deepening gloom, into the air that was bitter still, but quite windless. Followed by the children, she went over the snow under the dark boughs of the trees to the church door, and entered it, the women going behind her with lanterns under their cloaks. They set down their lanterns in the middle of the aisle, and the light made a little pale glow on the tombstones that formed the pavement. Keziah kneeled down and prayed aloud, and the voices of the people echoed hers; when her prayers had ceased and all was silent, the little faint tones of Ray stole through the stillness:

'God, please do not be angry any more because papa made a mistake; he did not mean to be cruel. Please save the sheep and the birds and save him. Please do not be angry any more.'

Then his own little voice died away in a sob, and all the women kneeling there in the cold and

the dark wept too. Solemnly, as they had entered, they left the church; some one had said, 'Let us sing a psalm,' but no one could sing; their hearts were too full, for all their men were out on the moors, and who could tell what might chance there? Then Keziah on her threshold turned and said to her neighbours:

'Now thank ye all kindly, but go to your homes. Gossiping is bad at such a time as this. For me I will keep by the hearth with the children. The Lord succour their father!'

The women were moved at the seriousness of a woman always mirthful and neighbourly, and each went quietly to her own cottage. She herself went home, as she had said that she should, and the little boys gathered about her knees, and the little girls slept in her arms. Night once more began to fall over the world of snow. In the inner kitchen the old pedlar and an old labourer, too aged to go out and assist to search, were talking low over their ale of storms that they had known forty long years before.

Keziah had shut no shutters; she had lit candles and put them against each casement so that by chance the light might assist her master if he were able to find his homeward way.

'Lord help them all, poor souls!' she thought, rocking the babies in her arms, and thinking of the ships at sea, of the travellers on the moor, of the sheep lost on the Tors, and the trains blocked in the snow.

Ray, with his hands clasped about his little naked legs, sat and gazed into the fire, his eyes wide open, his mouth parted. 'Pray do not make me go to bed,' he said once; '*pray* do not.'

So when she put the others to sleep she let him sit up with her by the fire. 'Why won't you go to bed, my dear?' she asked him, as the cuckoo clock told nine of the night.

Ray shuddered.

'In my bed, last night, when I did sleep, I saw papa dead in the snow, and God's birds covering him with leaves. I should see it again now.'

'Ah, my poor child!'

He leaned his head against her, and they sat in the chimney corner together.

The cuckoo called ten o'clock.

There was a sound of voices outside the house, the shuffling of men's feet in the crisp snow; the dog barked outside, the flash of torches flared red

on the lattices. Ray and his nurse sprang up and rushed to the door and forced it open. The men were bearing a litter, and the foremost of them cried out, 'Little master, it 's your father. We've done a good Christmas night's work. Nay, nay, he 's not dead; never fear!'

Ray rushed out into the snow.

For many moments all was confusion; then the men laid the shutter gently down before the fire, and taking off the wraps strown over him, showed Ray the motionless form of his father, whose eyes unclosed, and whose grey lips feebly murmured,—

'My little boy, do not be afraid.'

Ray burst into tears, and kissed his father as he had never dared to kiss him in his life.

Setting out to walk homewards from Tamsleigh, he had crossed half the moor in safety, in the teeth of the blinding snow, then as darkness fell had missed his way and had wandered so far and become so exhausted by the wind and the bitter air that he had lost all power of even guessing where he was, and so had grown feebler and blinder at each step, and had staggered for shelter into a hollow place made by some rocks and trees; there he had sat down, wrapping him-

self in his cloak, and trusting the dawn would break. But the fury of the storm had uprooted some of the trees and loosened some of the boulders; with a roar as of thunder the huge stones and the oak that grew with them had fallen across the entrance of his shelter, and barred him in, a prisoner. There, half-frozen, famished, miserable, he had passed the night of Christmas-eve and the wild day of Yule itself, while his people were searching for him east and west, north and south, and his little son was praying to God 'not to be angry.' He had resisted the longing to sleep that came over him, knowing such sleep fatal; but he had given himself up for lost, hemmed in by the impassable barrier of the fallen oaks and the rocks, and knowing well that none could see him or hear his voice, shout as he would over the desolate moor.

Death was very near him; and in its awful presence he regretted many things and repented many. He thought of his poor little children with shame and sorrow, and he remembered how he had struck the child for its charity to the birds —for the alms of bread that now he would have thanked Heaven for himself! When the sound of the searchers coming over the snow was borne

to his ear, and the cries of his own dog—the dog he had often chained and often beaten!—brought them to his hiding-place, and with ropes let down to him from above they dragged him up into the starlit whitened world, the stern vicar was no stronger than his little son; he swooned away.

He had been imprisoned in the snow for thirty hours.

As he lay in the warmth of his own hearth, with the firelight dancing on the light curls of Ray, he opened his feeble arms to the child.

'My boy, I have been cruel to you. Forgive me. Since my life has been spared, I will try to make it a blessing to you and to your brothers.'

'And the birds?' whispered Ray.

His father smiled.

'You shall hang a sheaf of corn out every winter, as they do in the Sweden of your story-books. I know now what it is—to die in the snow.'

Ray laid his head upon his father's breast, and was happy.

When the morning, which was cloudless, came, he had his sheaf of wheat, and hung it above the door, and all the birds flocked to it, fluttering and

chirping in little multitudes, the bold bright robins foremost.

'God did hear me when I asked him not to be angry any more,' said Ray, and Rob said, 'Me too I asked Him.'

And hand in hand they looked up at the broad blue sky.

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ecstasy. It was so many years that I had not seen my brothers! Were they not my brothers all?

This day of Palm, when our Orte, so brown and so grey, was all full of foliage and blossom like an old pitcher full of orange-flowers for a bridal, it was a somewhat brilliant troop of gymnasts who came to amuse the town; the troop was composed of an old man and his five sons, handsome youths and very strong, of course. They climbed on each other's shoulders, building up a living pyramid; they bent and broke bars of iron, they severed a sheep with one blow of a sword; in a word, they did what my father had done before them. As for me, I watched them stupefied, fascinated, dazzled, blind, drunk with delight, and almost crazy with a torrent of memories that seemed to rain on me like lava as I watched each exploit, as I heard each shout of the applauding multitudes.

It is a terrible thing, a horrible thing, those inherited memories that are born in you with the blood of others. I looked at them, I say, intoxicated with joy, mad with recollection and with longing:—and my mother destined me to a notary's desk and wished me to be shut up

there all my life, pen in hand, sowing the seeds of all the hatreds, of all the crimes, all the sorrows of mankind, lighting up the flames of rage and of greed in human souls for an acre of ground, for a roll of gold! She wished to make me a notary's clerk! I gazed at these men who seemed to me so happy; these slender, agile, vigorous creatures in their skins that shone like the skin of green snakes, in their broidered glittering spangled vests, in their little velvet caps with the white plume in each—'Take me! take me!' I shrieked to them; and the old king of the troop looked hard at me, and when their games were finished, crossed the cord that marked their arena, and threw his strong arms about me and cried: 'Body of Christ! you are little Pippo!' For he had been my father's mate.

To be brief, when the little band left Orte I went with them.

It was wickedly done, for my poor mother slept, knowing nothing, when in the dusk before daybreak I slipped through the bars of the casement, and noiselessly dropped on to a raft in the river below, and thence joined my new friends.

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That I have slain what I have slain—that is nothing. I would do the same thing again had I to live my life again. Yes; without pause or mercy would I do it. But my mother—she has lived alone, and she is mad. That is my crime.

I was a tall strong youth, full of courage, and handsome to the eye of women; I led a life noisy and joyous, and for ever in movement. I was what my father had been before me. So they all said.

Only I liked to finger a book and my father never had looked inside one; and, out of remembrance of the belief of my mother, I uncovered my head as I passed a church or saw a shrine, and to do this had not been in my father's habits. In these years I made a great deal of money, a great deal, at least, for a stroller, but it went as fast as it came. I was never a vicious man, nor a great gambler or drinker; yet my plump pieces soon took wing from my pocket, for I was very gay, and I liked to play a lover's part. My life was a good life, that I know; as for the life of the rich and of the noble, I cannot tell what it is like, but I think it is of a surety more gloomy and mournful than mine.

In Italy one wants so little; the air and the light, and a little red wine, and the warmth of

the wind, and a handful of maize or of grapes, and an old guitar and a niche to sleep in near a fountain that murmurs and sings to the mosses and marbles—these are enough, these are happiness in Italy. And it is not difficult to have thus much, or was not so in those days. I was never very poor, but whenever money jingled in my purse I treated all the troop and half the town, and we laughed loud till daybreak.

I was never aught save Pipistrello, Pipistrello the wrestler, who jumped and leaped and lifted an ox from the ground as easily as other men lift a child. No doubt to the wise it seems a fool's life, to the holy a life impure. But I had been born for it, no other was possible to me; and when money rained upon me, if I could ease an aching heart or make a sick lad the stouter for a hearty meal, or make a tiny child the gladder for a lapful of copper coins, or give a poor stray dog a friend and a bed of straw, or a belaboured mule a helpful push to the wheels of his cart—well, that was all the good a mountebank could look to do in this world, and one could go to sleep easy upon it.

When the old man died who had been my father's comrade, the troop fell to pieces, quarrel-

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